







***SCENES OF BOHEMIAN LIFE***



*HENRI MURGER*

SCENES OF  
BOHEMIAN LIFE

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

*OWEN SNELL*



SUSIL GUPTA  
POST BOX 10814 CALCUTTA

**BY SUSIL GUPTA**  
***FIRST PUBLISHED JANUARY 1945***

**PUBLISHED BY SUSIL GUPTA POST BOX**  
**10814, 22-30, GALIFF STREET, CALCUTTA**

**PRINTED BY ANIL BOSE AT CRITERION PRESS,**  
**8, JACKSON LANE, CALCUTTA**

## PREFACE

THE Bohemians featured in this book have nothing in common with the bohemian whose name the melodramatist of the boulevards has made synonymous with cheat and ruffian. They are not recruited from the ranks of bear-leaders, sword-swallowers, chain-peddlers, tricksters of the *all prizes, no blanks* school, petty money-jobbers, and the thousand other mysterious undenominated traders whose principal occupation is to have none, and who are always ready to do anything, except anything that is right.

The breed of Bohemian with which this book deals is not a modern product; it has existed always and everywhere, and can claim an illustrious descent. In Greek times (to go no further back) lived a distinguished Bohemian who wandered over Ionia living from hand to mouth on what charity gave him, and halting at night to hang by some hospitable hearth the harp which had sung the loves of Helen and the siege of Troy. The modern Bohemian can trace his ancestors down through the ages, in every epoch wherein art and literature flourished. In the Middle Ages the Homeric tradition is continued by minstrels and mountebanks, the retailers of lively lore, all the tuneful vagabonds of Touraine, all the poets who bore on their backs a pack of necessities and the *trouvère's* harp, and went singing over the meadowed countryside where grew the wild-rose of Clémence Isaire.

In the period between the days of chivalry and the dawn of the Renaissance, the Bohemian continued to walk all the roads of the realm, and even to set foot on the streets of Paris. There is Master Pierre Gringoire, friend of vagrants and enemy of abstinence; lean and famished, in the way of a man whose life is one long Lent, he pads along the pavements, nose to the wind like a sniffing dog, scenting the smell of kitchens and cook-shops; his eyes, filled with a gluttonous covetousness, devouring at a glance the hams hanging on pork-butcher's hooks, while he jingles (in imagination, not in his pockets, alas!) the ten crowns that messieurs the aldermen have promised him in payment for the *very pious and devotional* play he has composed for performance in the Palais de Justice. To the doleful and melancholy visage of Esmeralda's swain the chronicles of Bohemianism supply a companion of a less wintry humour and a more jovial countenance: Master Francois Villon, suitor of *la belle qui fut hault-miere, the helm-maker*. He indeed was poet and vagabond *per excellence*. His verse, extravagantly conceived, was marked (doubtless because of his possession of some such presentiment as the artists were inclined to credit

their *vates*, or prophet-poets, with) by a singular preoccupation with the subject of the gallows, on which the same Villon came within an ace of being hanged, for enquiring too closely into the colour of the king's crowns. This same Villon, who had more than once left breathless the constables on his track, this blustering frequenter of the dens of the Rue Pierre-Lascot, this plate-licker of the Duke of Egypt's court, this Salvator Rosa of the realm of poetry, composed elegies whose heart-rending pathos, and ring of truth, move the least impressionable, and make them forget the ruffian, the vagabond and the rake in the poet making music of his tears.

Moreover, amongst those whose work is relatively inaccessible, and little known except to folk for whom French literature does not date merely from the day when "Malherbe came", Francois Villon has had the honour of being most plagiarised, even by the bigwigs of our modern Parnassus. The domain of poverty was explored, and glory coined from the humble treasure found there. Those ballads, made in holes and corners and by the gutters, in bitter weather, by the inspiration of the Bohemian; those love-songs improvised in the hovel where *la belle* loosened her girdle for everyone who came, figure today in the emblazoned album of an aristocratic Chloris, metamorphosed as compliments scented with musk and amber.

The great era of the Renaissance opens before us. Michaelangelo ascends the scaffolding in the Sistine Chapel, and anxiously watches the young Raphael climb the Vatican stairs with his cartoons under his arm. Benvenuto meditates his statue of Perseus, Ghiberti carves the doors of the Baptistery while Donatello shapes his marbles on the bridges of the Arno; and while the city of the Medicis strives to rival in the possession of masterpieces the city of Popes Leo X and Jules II, Titian and Veronese give renown to the city of the Doges, and St. Mark's challenges St. Peter's.

This fever of genius, which rises to a height all at once, and spreads over the Italian peninsula with the violence of an epidemic, spreads its glorious contagion throughout Europe. Art, the rival of the Creator, walks equal with kings. Charles V bends to pick up Titian's brush, and Francis I dances attendance in the printing-press where Etienne Dolet is perhaps correcting the proofs of *Pantagruel*.

In the midst of this rebirth of the intellect the Bohemian still, in Balzac's phrase, hunts for his platter and his corner. Clement Marot, haunting the antechambers of the Louvre, becomes (before she had become the favourite of a king) the accepted lover of the lovely Diana whose smile brightened three reigns. The faithless Muse of the poet passes from the boudoir

of Diana of Poitiers to that of Margaret of Valois, whose perilous favour Marot pays for with imprisonment. In the same epoch another Bohemian, whose youth on the shores of Sorrente had been touched by the kiss of the epic Muse, Tasso, entered the court of the Duke of Ferrara as Marot had entered that of Francis I; but less fortunate than the lover of Diana and Margaret, the author of *Jerusalem* paid with the loss of his reason and his genius for the audacity of loving a daughter of the house of d'Este.

The religious wars and political disturbances which signalled in France the advent of the Medicis did nothing to arrest the upward trend of art. As the ball struck down, on the scaffold, Jean Goujon, who had unearthed the pagan chisel of Pheidias, Ronsard rediscovered the lyre of Pindar, and with the help of the Pleiade, founded the French lyric school. To this school of the Springtime succeeded Malherbe and his followers, who rooted from the language all the exotic graces which their predecessors had attempted to naturalise on Parnassus. It was a Bohemian, Mathurin Regnier, who defended to the last the ramparts of lyric poetry attacked by the phalanx of rhetoricians and grammarians that pronounced Rabelais barbarous and Montaigne obscure. It was the same Mathurin Regnier the cynic who, cracking the whip of satire Horace had used, cried indignantly against the ways of his age:

"Honour now has no great reputation".

In the seventeenth century the roll of Bohemianism contains a galaxy of names famous in the literary annals of the reigns of Louis XIII and Louis XIV; it counts members among the wits of the hôtel Rambouillet, where it collaborates in the *Garland of Julia*; it has entry to the Cardinal's palace, where it collaborates in the tragedy of *Marianne* with the minister-poet, who was the Robespierre of the monarchy; it sprinkles the salon of Marianne Delorme with madrigals, and pays court to Ninon under the trees of the Place Royale; it breakfasts at the *Goinfres* tavern or at the Epée Royale, and dines at the table of the Duc de Joyeuse; it duels under the street-lamps for *Urania* against *Job*. Bohemia makes love, makes war, and even turns diplomat; and in its old age, wearied of adventure, it turns the Old and New Testaments into verse, accepts benefices, and fat with revenues climbs to a bishop's throne or a seat in the Academy founded by one of its own members.

It was between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries that there appeared the two great men of genius which the nations to which they belong, set up against each other in their literary rivalry: Moliere and Shakespeare, those illustrious Bohemians whose careers offer many points of comparison.

The best-known literary names of the eighteenth century are also often inscribed in the archives of Bohemianism, which can cite, among the famous of that time, Jean-Jacques and d'Alembert, the founding of Notre Dame, and, among the obscure, Malfilâtre and Gilbert; two men with exaggerated reputations; for the inspiration of the one was only the faint reflection of the faint lyrical gift of Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, and the inspiration of the other no more than a mixture of vain incompetence and a spitefulness which had not even the excuse of being personal and sincere, since it was but the paid instrument of the rancours and passions of a party.

We close with that epoch our rapid survey of Bohemianism through the ages: an introduction, sown with illustrious names, which we have designedly placed at the beginning of our book, to put the reader on his guard against any of the preconceived false notions he might be liable to have on meeting with the name Bohemian, given for some time to a type from whom they esteem it honourable to distinguish those whose habits and language we have attempted to trace.

Today as of old, every man who takes up art, without other means of existence than art itself, must tread the path of the Bohemian. Most of our contemporaries who are the boast of art have been Bohemians; and in their calm years of enjoyment of fame they often recall, and perhaps regret, the times when they climbed the green slopes of youth with no other fortune, in the sunshine of twenty, than courage, which is the virtue of youth, and hope, which is the million of the poor.

For the reader who is uneasy, for the punctilious Bourgeois, for all who cannot have the i's of a definition dotted too clearly, we repeat as an axiom:

"Bohemia is the stage upon which is played the life of the artist; it is the ante-room to the Academy, the Hôtel Dieu, or the Morgue".

Let us add that Bohemia does not exist and cannot possibly exist elsewhere than in Paris.

Like every society, Bohemia has its *nuances*, and is made up of many classes, each with its own subdivisions which may with profit be tabulated here.

We will begin with the obscure Bohemia, the largest in point of numbers. It consists of the huge family of poor artists, condemned to be incognito, since they either do not know how or are not able to command the publicity to demonstrate their artistic existence, and, by exhibiting what they already are, prove what one day they may be. These are the race of inveterate dreamers, for whom art is a faith and not a profession; enthusiastic devotees, the mere sight of a master-

piece sufficing to throw them into a fever, whose loyal hearts beat high before everything that is worthy of admiration, without any asking of the name of painter or school. This Bohemia is recruited from the young who may be described as having aspirations, and from those who have fulfilled expectations, but who, through indifference or want of push or ignorance of practical affairs, imagine that all is done when a work is completed, and expect public applause and wealth to break in upon them and pour themselves at their feet. They live, so to speak, on the fringe of society, in isolation and idleness. Absorbed in their art, they take literally the academic presumption that a halo encircles a poet's head, are convinced that one shines around their's, and wait patiently to be discovered. We once knew a little school comprising such, of a type so odd that one could hardly believe it existed: they called themselves disciples of the creed of *art for art's sake*. With these simpletons, *art for art's sake* consisted of lauding each other to the skies, never aiding fortune, that did not even know their address, and waiting for pedestals to be placed under their feet.

Their's is a ridiculous passivity. Well (we say it once more to be believed) these exist in the bosom of obscure Bohemia many such beings whose wretchedness excites a sympathetic pity which good sense compels you to withdraw; for if you quietly tell them that we live in the nineteenth century, that the hundred-cent piece is the Ruler of humanity; and that boots don't fall ready polished from the skies, they turn their backs on you and call you a Bourgeois.

To speak truth, they are logical in their insensate heroism; they utter neither cries nor complaints, and stolidly submit to the obscurity and hardship of the lot they have made for themselves. They die decimated by that malady which science dare not describe by its true name—misery. But often, if they were so willed, they could escape the mortality that suddenly brings their lives to an end at an age when ordinarily life is just beginning. To do so it would only be necessary to make certain concessions to the hard laws of necessity; that is, to learn to divide their personalities, and include two beings in one: the poet, ever dreaming on the heights where sing the choir of inspired voices; and the man, working for a livelihood and winning his daily bread. But this duality, which is almost always to be found in well-tempered personalities, of which it is one of the distinctive characteristics, is not to be encountered among most of those young folk, whom pride, a false pride, has made deaf to all counsels of reason. So they die young, in some cases leaving behind them work which the world admires too late, and which would undoubtedly have been appraised earlier if it had not

been hidden from sight.

In the struggles of art it is much as in war; all the glory of conquest is reflected upon the leaders; the army divides up as its prize a few lines of an Order of the Day. As for the soldiers who have fallen in the fight, they are buried where they fell, and a single epitaph suffices for twenty thousand dead.

Likewise the multitude, which always fixes its eyes on what is uplifted, never lowers its regard to the subterranean world where these obscure labourers are struggling; their existence works itself out unknown, and often enough without their having had the satisfaction of a smile at a piece of work finished, they part from life enwrapped in a shroud of indifference.

There is in obscure Bohemia another section, composed of those who have been deluded or who have deluded themselves. They mistake a whim for a vocation, and, driven by a killing fate, they die, the latter the victims of a perpetual madness of vanity, the former idolators of a chimera.

Here let us permit ourselves a short digression.

The paths of art, so crowded and so perilous, are, in spite of the crowding and in spite of their drawbacks, growing every day more and more crowded, and as a result Bohemia was never more numerously populated.

If one considers reasons which might be responsible for this concourse, one may light on the following: many youngsters have taken seriously the panegyrics delivered upon unfortunate artists and poets. The names of Gilbert, Malfilâtre, Chatterton, and Moreau have been too often and too incautiously bandied about, and to no good end. There has been made of the tomb of these unfortunates a lectern from which has been preached the martyrdom of art and poetry.

Adieu, adieu, thou barren earth,  
And noxious man, and icy sun;  
Now like a lonely ghost I pass,  
My passing marked by none.

This despairing chant of Victor Escousse, puffed up with the arrogance which brought him a fictitious triumph, has lately become the *Marseillaise* of the volunteers of art, who rush to inscribe themselves in the martyrology of mediocrity.

For these funeral apotheoses, and laudatory requiems, have the allurements of an abyss for a feeble intellect and ambitious self-conceit, and many coming under the spell of their allure, have thought that fatality was half of genius; many have longed for the hospital bed where Gilbert died, hoping that they would become poets there, as he did a quarter of an hour before dying,

and believing it to be a necessary stage on the road to glory.

One cannot too strongly condemn these immoral falsehoods, these death-dealing paradoxes, which turn from a path where they might succeed so many who come to a miserable end in a course where they get in the way of those to whom a real sense of vocation gives the right of entry.

It is these dangerous sermonizings, these profitless posthumous puffs, which have created the ridiculous breed of the unappreciated, of weeping poets whose Muse has always red eyes and disordered hair, and all the impotent mediocrities who, confined in the prison of the unpublished, call the Muse a harsh stepmother and art a tyrant.

All truly powerful talents have something to say and say it sooner or later. Genius and talent are not unthought of accidents in human affairs; they have a *raison d'être*, and for that reason alone they will not remain for ever in obscurity; for if the crowd won't gather in front of them, they know how to get in front of the crowd. Genius is a sun: everyone can see it. Talent is a diamond which may be a long time hidden in darkness, but which is always found by somebody. It is a mistake to be moved to pity by the lamentations and hackneyed complaints of that crowd of novices and drones who practise art in spite of all that art can do, and who make up in Bohemia a category whose manners are distinguished by sloth, debauchery, and parasitism.

#### AXIOM

"The obscurer part of Bohemia is not a road, it is a cul-de-sac".

Indeed this sort of life leads nowhere. It is a brutish misery, in the midst of which intelligence is extinguished like a lamp in an airless place; where the heart hardens in savage misanthropy, and where the best of characters become the worst. If one has the misfortune to remain too long and to engage oneself too deeply in this blind alley, one will never get out of it, or one will escape by dangerous doorways to find oneself in a neighbouring Bohemia whose customs come under another jurisdiction than that of literary physiology. We will mention here a singular kind of Bohemians who may be called amateurs. It is not the least interesting kind. They find the Bohemian life a life full of allurements: not to eat all day, to sleep in the open air under the tears of the weeping night and to dress in nankeen in the month of December seems to them the perfection of human felicity, and to be introduced to it, they desert the family hearth, and the course of study which would lead them to a certain livelihood. They turn their backs determinedly on an

assured future to gather the adventures of a life of hazard. But as the most robust could not stand up to a regime which would give Hercules consumption, they soon quit the country, and, hankering after the family roast, they return to marry their little cousin and to become notaries in a town of thirty thousand souls; and at evening, 'by the fireside, they have the pleasure of telling the story of the artist's hardships, with the enthusiasm of a traveller who retails the story of a tiger hunt. Others are obstinate and stake their pride on sticking it out; but once they have exhausted the credit which young men of family can always avail themselves of they are in worse plight than the genuine Bohemians, who, having never had any other resources, have at least those which their intelligence gives them. We once knew one of these amateur Bohemians who, after having been three years in Bohemia and having quarrelled with his family, died one fine day, and was carried to the common grave in the paupers' hearse: he had an estate of ten thousand francs a year!

It is unnecessary to say that such Bohemians as these have nothing in common with art and that they are the most obscure among the least known of darkest Bohemia.

Now we come to the true Bohemia; to that which is largely the subject of this book. Those who compose it are those who are really called by art, and have a chance of becoming its elect. This Bohemia is, like the others, bristling with dangers; two whirlpools menace it on either side: misery and misgiving. But between these two whirlpools there at least is a road leading to an end that the Bohemians can see with their eyes, while they strive to reach it with their hands.

This is official Bohemia: thus denominated because those who constitute it have given public proof of their existence, have indicated their living presence in life otherwise than by means of registration on the civil registry; since, to employ an expression of their own, their names are their advertisement, being known everywhere in the literary and artistic world, and the output which bears their name, has currency, at a moderate price it is true.

To arrive at this end, which is perfectly determinate, every road is a good road and the Bohemians know how to put to use even the accidents of the road. Rain or dust, shade or sun, nothing arrests these hardy adventurers, whose vices proceed from a virtue. With a spirit kept awake by ambition, which beats the charge before them, and drives them to the assault of the future, fighting want without remission, their ingenuity, whose flame burns ever, makes them clear obstacles that scarcely hinder them. Their daily existence is a work of genius, a recurring problem that they always succeed in solving with the

aid of enterprising mathematics. These fellows would have fetched silver from Harpagon, and would have looked for truffles on Medusa's raft. At need they could practise abstinence with all the devotion of an anchorite; but when a trifle of money fell into their hands you would see them gallop off on the most ruinous escapades, loving the loveliest and youngest, drinking the best and oldest, and not finding windows enough to throw their money from. Then, when their last écu is dead and buried, they return to take potluck at the table where their cover is always set, and, armed with a host of devices, poach all the industries connected with art, chasing from morning to night that untamed animal which is called a five-franc piece.

Bohemians know everything and go everywhere, according as their boots are polished or worn. One day they will be seen seated in the chimney-corner of a fashionable salon, the next day sitting embowered in a tea house. They cannot walk ten steps on the boulevard without meeting a friend, or thirty steps anywhere without meeting a creditor.

Bohemia talks a language of its own, drawn from the conversation of the studio, the jargon of the theatre, and the debates of the publishing house. Every eclecticism of style finds place in this extraordinary idiom, where apocalyptic turns of speech jostle slang, where the rusticity of popular speech is allied with elaborate periods drawn from the same mould as that from which Cyrano drew his hectoring bluster; where paradox, that favourite of modern literature, treats reason, as Cassandra is treated in the pantomimes; where irony has the sting of the sharpest acid and the dexterity of those marksmen who hit a bull with their eyes bandaged; an intellectual *argot* unintelligible except to those who have the key, and whose audacity surpasses that of the freest speech. The vocabulary of Bohemia is the hell of the rhetorician and the paradise of the neologist.

Such is, to sum up, the life of Bohemia, misunderstood by the world's puritans, decried by the puritans of art, and abused by all the timid and spiteful mediocrities who cannot find enough matter for outcry, falsehood and calumny, without downing the voice and the renown of those who pass through this vestibule of fame by uniting fearlessness to talent.

A life of patience and courage where no one can fight without being clad in a strong breastplate of indifference for a defence against the foolish and the envious, where, if one dislikes slipping in the gutter, one must not for a moment lose self-respect, which is the one staff to lean on; a delightful and a terrible life, which has its victors and its martyrs, and on which no one should enter without first resigning himself to the pitiless law of *vae victis*, woe to the conquered.

H. M.



# CONTENTS.

CHAP		PAGE
	PREFACE	i
I	THE BIRTH OF BOHEMIA	1
II	AN ENVOY FROM GOD	21
III	LENTEN LOVES	26
IV	RODOLPHE ALI OR THE TURK FROM NECESSITY	32
V	CHARLEMAGNE'S CROWN	37
VI	MISS MUSETTE	44
VII	ON THE BILLOWS OF WEALTH	49
VIII	THE VALUE OF TEN FRANCS	56
IX	WHITE VIOLETS	62
X	THE TEMPEST	68
XI	A CAFÉ IN BOHEMIA	74
XII	A BOHEMIAN RECEPTION	80
XIII	A HOUSE WARMING	98
XIV	MISS MIMI	98
XV	DONEC GRATUS	109
XVI	CROSSING THE RED SEA	114
XVII	THE TOILET OF THE GRACES	120
XVIII	FRANCINE'S MUFF	131
XIX	THE WHIMS OF MUSETTE	146
XX	MIMI HAS FEATHERS	161
XXI	ROMEO AND JULIET	170
XXII	EPILOGUE TO A LOVE AFFAIR	175



## CHAPTER I

### THE BIRTH OF BOHEMIA .

CHANCE, which sceptics tell us is God's agent, brought a few individuals together into a sort of fraternal organisation. How this organisation later developed into Bohemia is what the author of this book desires to place before the public.

On the morning of the 8th of April Alexander Schaunard, who was devoted to the two munificent arts of music and painting, was rudely awakened by the carillon that a neighbouring cock, which served him for a clock, sounded for him.

"Curse it!" cried Schaunard, "my feathered time-piece is very early! Surely it isn't today already!"

As he uttered these words he leaped out of a dubious piece of furniture of his own ingenious invention, which, serving as a cot at night (needless to say very poorly) during the day fulfilled the roles of all the other pieces of furniture which had disappeared after the last cold winter. It was, in short, a piece of furniture which served almost every purpose.

To protect himself from the biting cold morning wind he hastily put on a coat of rose-coloured satin sprinkled with stars which he used as a dressing-gown. This ragged garment (it was nothing better) had been, on the night of a masked ball, left behind by some foolish person who had been deceived by the false appearance of the artist. On that night, Schaunard had disguised himself as the Marquis of Mondos and seductively jingled a dozen crowns in his pockets. Crowns indeed! They were no more than punched metal pieces borrowed from the properties of a theatre!

When he had completed his toilet the artist went to open his window. The sun's rays, penetrating the room with the sharpness of an arrow of light, hurt his eyes which were still foggy with sleep. At the same moment a clock somewhere in the neighbourhood struck five.

"Dawn!" murmured Schaunard. "How astonishing! But," he added, consulting a calendar hanging on his wall, "but there seems to be some mistake. According to scientific deductions the sun, at this time of the year, should only rise at 5-30. It is just five and it has risen already! What awful enthusiasm on its part! It is certainly wrong. I must report the matter to the Bureau of Longitudes. It is very disturbing indeed. Today, following yesterday, which was the 7th, today must be the 8th, unless Saturn moves backwards. And if I am to believe this notice," continued Schaunard once more reading the bailiffs' warning which was struck up on the wall, "I must today, at midday exactly, vacate these premises and pay Mr. Bernard, my

landlord, the sum of 75 francs due for three months' rent which he claims from me in the most dreadful scrawl I have yet seen. I had hoped, of course, that chance would, as usual, liquidate the debt. But no such luck I'm afraid. But I still have about six hours before me. Perhaps if I make good use of them... Yes, yes, I must do something!"

He was laying out an overcoat, which had originally been shaggy but was now completely bald, when, suddenly, as if he had been bitten by a tarantulla, he began to execute, in his room, a dance of his own composition which had often, at public balls, attracted the attention of the police.

"Well! Well!" he exclaimed. "The morning air does give one ideas! I think I am, at last, on the track of my melody. Now, let me see..."

Schaunard, half naked, seated himself before his piano, and, after awakening the sleeping instrument with a tempestuous bang on the keys, he began, softly, to work out on the keyboard the melody for which he had searched so long.

Do, sol, mi, do, la, si, do, ray. Boom! Boom! Fa, ray, mi, day. "Dear! oh dear! This ray is as false as Judas himself!" he said thumping violently on the doubtful note. "Perhaps the minor key is better..."

He wanted to portray, in a melody, as skilfully as he could, the sorrow of a young lady picking a white daisy near a blue lake. "It was not a very original idea. But, since it was the fashion, and no editor would dare to publish a song without a blue lake, he had to conform..."

Do, sol, mi, do, la, si, do, ray. "Quite good! It certainly gives the notion of a daisy and should please any crowd of botanists." La, si, do, ray...

"Damn that ray! Now, to create the impression of a blue lake something liquid is necessary, something blue, with moonlight (there's moonlight too!). And, of course, the swan must not be forgotten..."

Fa, mi, la, sol, Schaunard continued, chopping out the pellucid notes of the high octave. Now only the farewell of the young girl, who decides to throw herself into the blue lake to join her beloved buried beneath the waves, remained.

"This ending is not at all clear," murmured Schaunard. "But it's quite interesting. Something tender and sad is required. Come, come! there are at least a dozen bars which weep like so many Madeleines to break the heart! Brr! Brr!" he shivered in his starry coat, "If only I could get some wood! Perhaps I could use that joist in my alcove...it takes up too much room when I have visitors over...to dinner. I could make a small fire with it..." La, la, ray, mi, "Really, inspiration comes

to wrap up<sup>o</sup> my cold head! Ah! Bah! Worse and worse! Let me continue and drown the young lady!"

And while his fingers continued to torment the palpitating keyboard, Schaunard, eyes ablaze, ears attentive, pursued his melody, which, like an elusive sylph, fluttered in the middle of the deep mist which the vibrations of the instrument seemed to release in the room.

"Now let me see," said Schaunard, "how my music agrees with the words of the poet."

And he began to sing in a most disagreeable voice this fragment of poetry which is used especially, for comic operas and common-place stories.

The fair young girl  
Towards the starry sky,  
(While removing her mantilla)  
Throws a misty glance,  
And, in the blue surge  
Of the silvery waves of the lake.....

"Whatever does he mean?" Schaunard asked with just indignation. "The blue surge of the silvery lake! Wherever did he see that? It is much too romantic. This poet is a fool! He has seen neither silver nor a lake! Besides his ballad is stupid. The cadence of the verses cramps my music. I'll compose my own poems in future...in fact immediately! I seem to be in the mood. I'll compose my own couplets and adapt my music to them."

And Schaunard, holding his head between his hands, assumed the serious posture of a mere mortal about to commune with the Muses.

After several minutes of this he produced one of those deformed verses that discerning writers, not without justification, call a monstrosity. They are composed easily enough and are at best only a temporary appendage to the inspiration of a composer. But Schaunard's monstrosity at least possessed common-sense and very clearly revealed the disturbed state of his soul on this fatal arrival of the 8th of April.

Here is the verse:

Eight and eight make sixteen,  
I put down six and retain one  
I will easily be able  
To find someone,  
So poor and honest,  
That he will lend me 800 francs  
To pay my debts  
When I have the time.

*Refrain*

And when rentless time strikes  
A quarter to twelve,

I will honestly pay my dues  
To Mr. Bernard.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Schaunard reading his composition. "These are pretty poor verses! But I have no time to improve on them. Let me now try and fit the music into the syllables."

And with that peculiar nasal voice of his he once again took up the composition of his melody. He seemed to be very satisfied with the result he obtained and made one of those characteristic grimaces which always accompanied any triumph he achieved. But this proud mood did not last very long.

A nearby clock struck 11. Each stroke, as it entered his room and dissipated itself in mocking tones, seemed to ask the unfortunate Schaunard: "Are you ready?"

The artist leaped on to his chair. "There's very little time left!" he said to himself. "Only three-quarters of an hour in which to find 75 francs and new lodgings! Such an achievement only belongs to the realms of magic! I'll give myself five minutes to find a solution..." And thrusting his head between his knees he began to reflect. Five minutes later Schaunard straightened his head but had not found anything resembling 75 francs.

"I've decided to leave the place. That's obvious. The time is opportune and perhaps I shall have luck on my side which is very necessary if I'm to liquidate my debt with Mr. Bernard at all."

Schaunard, having crammed the cavernous pockets of his overcoat with all the things they could hold, tied some clothes together in a silk handkerchief, and left the room, but not before having addressed a small farewell speech to his old home.

As he was crossing the courtyard, the janitor, who appeared to be on the look out for him, stopped him suddenly.

"Hi, Mr. Schaunard!" he cried barring the artist's way. "Have you forgotten? It is the 8th today."

"Eight and eight make sixteen  
I put down six and retain one,"

hummed Schaunard.

"You're very slow shifting," said the janitor. "It's 11-30 and the new tenant should arrive any minutes now. Hurry!"

"Well then," replied Schaunard, "let me pass. I'm going to get a furniture van."

"Certainly! But before you shift there's a small formality to be fulfilled. I have orders not to permit you to take even a hair out without first paying the money you owe. You have it?"

"Lord!" exclaimed Schaunard taking a step forward.

"If you come into my room I'll give you the receipts," said the janitor.

"I will take them on my return."

"But why not now?" the janitor said with persistence.

"I'm going to the money changer's...I haven't any money."

"Ah! Ah!" replied the janitor uneasily. "You're going for the money? In that case, to oblige you, I'll keep that small parcel you have under your arm. It seems to embarrass you."

"Janitor!" said Schaunard with dignity, "do you by any chance mistrust me? Do you think I could carry my furniture in my handkerchief?"

"I beg your pardon, Sir" replied the janitor lowering his tone respectfully "but those are my instructions. Mr. Bernard expressly told me not to permit you to take even a hair out of here before you had paid your dues."

"But look!" Schaunard said opening his parcel, "This isn't hair! They are clothes I am taking to my laundress who lives next to the money-changer's, only about twenty feet from here."

"Ah! That's different!" the janitor said after having examined the contents of the parcel. "But may I know your new address?"

"Rue de Rivoli," the artist replied coldly, and having got past the janitor quickly gained the road.

"Rue de Rivoli," murmured the janitor thoughtfully stroking his nose. "But it's rather peculiar that they should have rented him rooms there without having made previous inquiries here. Very peculiar, indeed! But he won't shift his furniture without first paying, even should the new tenant arrive. That's another bother! Why here he is already!"

Followed by a porter who seemed to sink under his burden, a young man, wearing a Louis XIIIth cap, entered the vestibule.

"Is my room free?" he asked the janitor.

"Not yet, Sir, but it will be. The person who occupies it has gone out to fetch a van to shift his things. You'd better put your furniture in the courtyard while you wait."

"It may rain," replied the young man calmly chewing a small bouquet of violets that he held between his teeth. "My furniture is sure to be spoiled. Porter," he added, addressing the man who stood behind him, "put those in the vestibule, return to my old lodgings and fetch what remains of my furniture and *objets d'art*."

The porter arranged against the wall several cases which stood six or seven feet in height.

"Wait!" said the young man to the porter pointing to a stain, on the canvas. "This is dreadful! You have cracked my Venice glass! Be more careful on your second journey, parti-

cularly of my library."

"What is he doing with a Venice class?" murmured the janitor, uneasily viewing the cases piled up against the wall. "But I don't see any such glass. It's probably only a joke. All I can see is a folding screen. Anyway, let's wait and see what's brought on the second journey."

"Will your tenant shift soon, do you think? It's 12-30 and I want to shift in," said the young man.

"I don't think he'll be long now," the janitor replied. "In any case all your furniture has not arrived."

The young man was about to reply when a messenger entered the courtyard.

"Mr. Bernard?" he inquired drawing out a letter from a leather book case.

"He's at home," replied the janitor.

"Here's a letter for him," said the messenger. "Please give me a receipt for it", and he held out a letter to the janitor.

"Excuse my leaving you alone," said the janitor to the young man who was impatiently pacing the courtyard. "But I have to deliver this letter to Mr. Bernard, my landlord."

When the porter entered, Mr. Bernard was about to have a shave.

"What is it Durand?"

"A man has just brought a letter for you from the Ministry," he replied removing his cap and holding out the letter, which had the seal of the Department of War on it, to Mr. Bernard.

"Good Lord," exclaimed Mr. Bernard trembling so much with excitement that he very nearly cut himself with his razor."

From the War Department! I'm sure it must be about my nomination to the grade of chevalier in the Legion of Honour that I have prayed for so long! They have done me justice at least! Wait Durand," he said searching in his waistcoat pocket, "Here are a hundred sous! You can drink to my health. Wait, wait, I haven't my purse on me at present but I'll give it to you. Wait."

The janitor was so surprised at such overwhelming generosity, which was not very usual with his landlord, that he put on his cap again. But Mr. Bernard, who at other times would have severely denounced this infraction of the laws of society, did not now seem to notice it. He put on his glasses, tore open the envelope with the respect with which a vizier might a firman received from a sultan, and began to read. After the first few lines his fat face turned crimson and his eyes surprised and angry. In a little while his features became so distorted that it seemed as if his whole body was suffering an earthquake.

This is what the letter, with the paper-head of the War

Department which had been delivered with such urgency, and for which Mr. Durand had signed a receipt, contained :

Dear Sir,

Discretion, which, if one can believe history, is the progenitor of good manners, obliges me to inform you that, in the cruel position in which I at present find myself, I am unable to fulfil the custom of paying my rent, particularly when it is in arrears. This morning I entertained the hope that I would be able to discharge my dues. What an illusion! I have met with nothing but bad luck and I have lost my peace of mind and security. I had counted on being able to obtain some money, but of the considerable sums for which I had hoped, I have obtained only three francs! I would not dream of offering them to you. But better days are in store for beautiful France and myself. There is no doubt about that. As soon as they arrive I will inform you of it immediately as I am also very desirous of getting back my precious furniture which, for the time being, I leave under your protection. In the meantime I am glad to inform you that the sum owed to you has been noted down in the register of my honesty. Among my belongings I would particularly recommend my piano and a box containing sixty different coloured locks of hair which have been cut off the head of the Graces themselves by the knife of Love. You have my permission, Sir, to rent the room in which I lived to whomsoever you wish.

Alexander Schaunard.

When he had read this letter, which had been written by the artist in the office of one of his friends, who was employed in the War Department, Mr. Bernard indignantly crumpled it in his hand. Then his eyes alighted on Durand, who was still waiting for the promised tip, and he brutally asked him what he was doing there.

"I am waiting, sir!"

"What for?"

"Your generous promise.....because of the good news!" stammered the janitor.

"Get out! How dare you stand before me with your hat on!"

"But, sir....."

"Get out! No. Wait. I want you to go up to the room of that villainous artist who has left without paying me."

"Mr. Schaunard?" inquired the janitor.

"Yes," the landlord said his anger gradually rising. "And if he has taken the smallest article I shall dismiss you! Do you hear? I'll dismiss you!"

"But that's impossible!" murmured the poor janitor. "Mr. Schaunard hasn't shifted! He has gone to get the money to pay you and hire a van to shift his things."

"Shift his things!" exclaimed Mr. Bernard. "Hurry up and see if he has taken any of his furniture. He has tricked you and made his get-away!"

"God! What a fool I am!" cried Durand trembling before the olympian anger of his superior who now led him down the stairs.

When they reached the courtyard the janitor was immediately accosted by the young man in the white cap.

"Ah! There you are! When do you think I can occupy my room? Isn't today the 8th April? Haven't I rented a room here? And haven't I given you an advance? Have I or haven't I?"

"Just a minute, sir," said the landlord. Then turning towards the janitor, "Durand, I shall speak to the gentleman. You run up and see if that villian Schaunard has by any chance returned for his furniture."

Durand disappeared up the staircase.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said turning to the young man, "but whom have I the honour to address?"

"I am in a dreadful predicament, sir," replied Mr. Bernard. A slight difficulty has arisen between myself and a tenant of mine...the very man whose room you've come to take."

"Sir! Sir!" a voice suddenly shouted from the top storey.

"Mr. Schaunard is not here...but his room is here...I mean ...What a fool I am!...I mean he has taken nothing...not even a hair, sir!"

"Very well. Come down." Replied Mr. Bernard. "O God! Have a little patience, sir, I beg of you. My janitor will have the furniture of my former tenant shifted out and in half an hour you can occupy it. Besides your furniture hasn't arrived yet."

"But it has," replied the young man calmly.

Mr. Bernard looked around him but could only discover the large cases that had disturbed the janitor.

"But I don't understand," he murmured. "I see nothing!"

"Here," replied the young man lifting the lid of one of the cases. The landlord was stupefied to see inside it columns of marble, bas-reliefs and busts of great masters.

"But your furniture?" insisted Mr. Bernard.

"Why, here they are!" replied the young man pointing to the sumptuous articles which he had picked up at an auction in the Bullion hotel.

"My dear sir" replied the landlord "Please be serious!"

"But I am!"

"You must understand, sir, furniture is very necessary as a guarantee."

"Hang it all! Isn't this sufficient guarantee for a miserable room?"

"No, sir! I want to see furniture, real furniture, in mahogany!"

"My dear man, a sage has said that neither gold nor mahogany will make you happy. Speaking for myself, I hate it. It is horrible wood! And everybody uses it!"

"But how can you manage without furniture?"

"Furniture takes up too much room."

"But what about a bedstead? Where will you sleep?"

"I sleep in the arms of Providence, sir!"

"Pardon me, but may I just ask you one more question? What are you by profession?"

At that moment the young man's porter entered the courtyard and among the things he carried was to be seen an easel.

"O, Sir!" cried Durand with terror. "He's a painter!"

"An artist?" asked Mr. Bernard, the hair on his head rising. "A painter!! But," he said addressing the janitor, "didn't you make any inquiries about the gentleman? Didn't you know who he was?"

"O God!" exclaimed the poor man. "But he gave me five francs in advance. How could I question him?"

"Have you quite finished?" demanded the young man in his turn.

"Sir," replied Mr. Bernard calmly placing his spectacles on nose. "Since you haven't any furniture you cannot shift in. The law authorises me to refuse any tenant who does not bring such a guarantee."

"Isn't my word enough?" the artist asked with dignity.

"That isn't as good as furniture. Please look for lodgings elsewhere. Durand, return the money."

"Eh?" the porter asked stupefied.

"I have put it in the savings bank".

"But, sir," said the young man "You don't expect me to find lodgings now. Let me stay here for at least a day."

"You can stay at the hotel" replied Mr. Bernard. Then after a moment's reflection: "If you like you can have the room furnished. You can use the furniture of my former tenant. Only, of course, in these peculiar circumstances, I shall expect you to pay in advance."

"What do you want for this hovel of yours?" asked the artist.

"Twenty-five francs. But you must pay in advance."

"Alright. All right. You don't have to repeat that twice," said the young man searching his pockets. "Have you got change for 500 francs?"

"Eh?" asked the stupefied landlord. "What did you say?"

"Five hundred francs! Half a thousand! Haven't you ever seen one?" the arist said waving a note before the eyes of the landlord and janitor, who, at sight of it appeared to lose his mental equilibrium.

"Certainly, you shall have it," the landlord said respectfully. "I shall deduct the five francs you advanced Durand".

"He may have it," said that artist "on condition that he comes every morning to tell me the day and date, the moon's quarter, the time and the form of government under which we live."

"O Sir!" exclaimed Durand making a low bow.

"My good man, you'll serve me as a sort of almanac. Now you can help my porter to shift my things in."

"I'll bring you your receipt, sir," said the landlord.

Before that evening Mr. Bernard's new tenant, the painter Marcel, installed himself in the room of the fugitive Schaunard, and had transformed it almost into a palace.

Meanwhile, somewhere in Paris, Schaunard was doing his best to collect some money. He had developed borrowing into a fine art. In the event of having to approach strangers for a loan he had made a deep study of the manner in which money went to those who pursued it and he was as intimately acquainted with the ebb and flow of money among his friends as a pilot is with the tides. Some of his friends at his approach would not be heard to say: "Here's Schaunard," but: "It must be either the first or the fifteenth of the month!" To facilitate the exaction of this periodical tithe on his friends Schaunard had drawn up an alphabetical list where he could readily lay hands on his friends and acquaintances. Before each name he had set down the maximum amount that could be exacted from him, the date on which he was at his lowest ebb, when he denied and a characteristic menu. Besides this list Schaunard kept other books in which were carefully noted every sum of money he had borrowed. He had every intention of paying them back. When his uncle in Normandy died he would inherit his fortune and he did not want to return to his friends more perhaps than he had borrowed from them. When the sum he borrowed from any particular individual reached twenty francs he struck his name off with a single bold stroke. In this way he knew exactly where he could borrow and this he called his "floating debt." And since his friends knew that he would return the money when he was in a position to do so, they were ever ready to

oblige him, if they could. Eleven hours had elapsed since he left Mr. Bernard's but he had not been able to collect a single crown out of the 75 francs. This was the result of a small difficulty due to the juxtaposition of names beginning with M. V. & R. on his famous list. From no other person on the list could he borrow because they were all at the moment in his own unenviable position.

At about six o'clock his hungry stomach informed him that it was dinner time. He was then before Mr. U's door.

"Where are you going, sir?" the janitor asked him.

"To Mr. U..." replied the artist.

"He's not at home."

"Mrs. U?"

"She isn't at home either. They have ordered me to inform any friends who might visit them that they are dining out in town. They have left a note."

The janitor held out a piece of paper on which his friend U had written: We are dining out with Schaunard. See you when we return.

"Very well" he said and left.

"Fate does play peculiar tricks on one!"

Schaunard then suddenly remembered that he was only a few feet away from a small tavern where he had dined on two or three occasions. He made a decision and directed his steps towards the establishment, which was on the Maine embankment and known to all Bohemians as La Mere Cadet.

The clientele of the tavern consisted of waggon drivers on their way to Orleans, singers from Montparnasse and actors from Babino. During the season art students from the numerous studios adjoining the Luxembourg, journalists on mysterious papers, and unknown authors came in crowds to dine at La Mere Cadet which was famous for its rabbit-stews, and sauerkraut and a thin white wine with a fiery smell. Schaunard sat in the grove which consisted of nothing more than two or three dilapidated old trees.

"Well! Well! things could be worse!" said Schaunard to himself. He ordered a soup, half a sauerkraut, and two half rabbit-stews. He had noticed that by dividing his orders he usually obtained more than his portion.

This order attracted the attention of a young girl who was dressed in white, with orange blossoms in her hair, dancing shoes and a veil which hid her identity. She was a singer from Montparnasse and had come to snatch a dinner during a break in the rehearsal of Lucia. She had just finished her meal which consisted almost exclusively of artichokes in oil with vinegar.

"Two rabbit-stews!" she murmured to the waitress. "He

eats rather well! How much do I owe Adèle?"

"Four artichokes, four small cups of coffee and bread... all that makes nine sous."

"Here you are" said the singer, and as she walked out she hummed a tune to herself.

"A Singer," said a mysterious person seated at Schaunard's table behind a rampart of books.

"Is she? I could have almost guessed that from her diet," said Schaunard pointing to the remains of her meal. "I can't understand how she can eat vinegar!"

"Yes, pretty harsh stuff," said the mysterious person. "Orleans has established a reputation for its manufacture."

Schaunard made a close examination of the man who was now endeavouring to draw him into conversation. He had large blue eyes, which seemed to be perpetually in search of something and lent his face that beautiful, placidity which he had only observed in seminarists. His face was the colour of ivory, except for his cheeks which were slightly tinged with red. He had a large mouth and his lips protruded like a negro's revealing strong canine teeth. His chin sat in two folds on a white cravat one end of which pointed upwards and the other to the ground. From under the broad brim of a felt hat his fair hair fell in a cascade. He wore a hazel coloured overcoat which was now shabby and threadbare. The large pockets were stuffed to overflowing with papers and brochures of all kinds. Unaware that he was the object of a close study he continued to drink his sauerkraut, frequently making signs to denote ample satisfaction. While he ate he read a book propped up before him and from time to time made a note in it with a pencil which balanced over his ear.

"What!" Schaunard suddenly shouted striking his glass with his knife, "No rabbit-stew?"

"Sir," replied the waitress who had arrived with a plate in her hand, "there's none left. This gentleman ordered the last." And she put the plate down before the man with the books.

"Damn!" cried Schaunard.

There was such disappointment in his voice that the other man was touched. He looked up from behind his book and placing the plate near Schaunard said softly:

"Won't you share this with me, sir?"

"But I'll be depriving you," said Schaunard.

"You will be depriving me of a great pleasure."

"Well, in that case, sir..." Schaunard took up his plate.

"Permit me to offer you the head," said the stranger.

"You're much too kind!"

But as he held out his plate Schaunard noticed that the

stranger served him with the very portion he had refused.

"Why is he being so polite?" Schaunard almost groaned to himself.

"If the head is the noblest part of man," said the stranger, "it is the most disagreeable part of the rabbit. Many hate it. But I'm different. I adore it."

"I'm sorry to deprive you of it," said Schaunard.

"Funny! but I have the head! Perhaps if you look more carefully..."

"Permit me," said Schaunard holding his plate under the stranger's nose. "But what portion is this?"

"Good heavens! Another head! Its a bicephalus rabbit!" cried the stranger.

"What? Bi...?"

"...cephalus. A Greek word." Mr. de Buffon, who has written a pamphlet on the subject, cites some examples of such irregularities. Heavens! I didn't dream I'd eat such phenomena!"

Thanks to this incident the conversation now flowed freely. Schaunard who did not want to be outdone in politeness ordered a litre of wine. The man with the books ordered another in return. Schaunard offered him some salad. The stranger offered him some dessert. By six o'clock they had finished six bottles of wine between them. The conversation gradually became more personal and they were soon personal friends. When the man with the books had listened to the confidences of Schaunard he revealed that his name was Gustave Colline. He was a philosopher and lived by giving lessons in botany, mathematics and several other sciences.

The little money he thus earned he spent in the purchase of books. He was a familiar figure, in his hazel coloured overcoat, to all the bookstall-keepers from Concorde to Saint-Michael. What he did with all the books he bought, which would certainly take a man a lifetime to read, nobody knew, and perhaps he did not know himself. It was just a bad habit which had become a passion with him. And if he should happen to return home without a new book, he would readapt the words of Titus and exclaim: "I have lost everything!" His coaxing manner and brilliant language, the terrible puns with which his conversation was adorned, captivated Schaunard who immediately asked his permission to add his name to his famous list.

When they left La Mère Cadet it was nine o'clock. Both were slightly tipsy and carefully picked their way through the crowds of drinkers.

Colline invited Schaunard to have some coffee and the latter accepted on the condition that he was allowed to stand a round

of drinks. They entered a café on the Saint Germain-l'Auxerrois road dedicated to Momus, god of gambling and laughter.

When they entered the estaminet two customers were engaged in a lively conversation. One was a young man whose head appeared to loose itself in the depths of an enormous multicoloured beard. In strange contrast his head was almost bald only a few stray hairs endeavouring to hide its nudity. He wore a black coat, threadbare at the elbows, and his trousers must have, in the distant past, been black. But his shoes, which could never have been new, looked as if, they had several times travelled round the world, in the footsteps of the wandering Jew.

Schaunard observed that his friend Colline was a friend of the young man with the monstrous beard.

"You know him? he asked the philosopher.

"Why, yes," he replied, "I sometimes meet him at the library. I'm told he's a man of letters."

"He looks like one," said Schaunard.

The young man's companion was a man of about forty with an apoplectic temperament. He had a large head and his neck was invisible. Idiocy was written in capital letters on his forehead and he wore a small black skull-cap. His name was Mouton and worked in the town hall where he kept the register of deaths.

"Mr. Rodolphe!" he cried in a shrill girlish voice, shaking the young man by a button on his coat. "Will you listen to me? Very well then, I say papers serve no useful purpose. Listen...I'm the father of a family...good...I visit this café to amuse myself playing dominoes...Follow me closely..."

"Go on, go on..." said Rodolphe.

"Well, continued old Mouton punctuating each word with a thump on the table so that the mugs and glasses shook.

"Well, I start reading...good...And what do I find? One maintains a thing is black, another that it is white, and one this and the other that. What am I to do? Now, I am a good father to my family and I come here everyday..."

"To play dominoes..." said Rodolphe.

"I read an article which contradicted my own opinion. I saw red...it put me in a terrible temper. Why? Because, Mr. Rodolphe, I know that all papers are false. Yes, false! And journalists are a set of low brigands!"

"Nevertheless, Mr. Mouton..."

"Yes, brigands!" continued the man.

"They are responsible for all the misfortunes in the world. They start revolutions and introduce paper money. There's the case of Murat."

"But it's Marat not Murat."

"No, No," replied Mouton. "Its Murat. I attended his funeral when I was young..."

"But I assure you..."

"No, I know I'm right."

"Very well," said Rodolphe. "It's Murat."

"But what was I saying?" asked the stubborn Mouton. "O yes! Murat, who used to work in a cellar...well...Didn't the Bourbos send him to the guillotine when he proved a traitor?"

"Traitor? Guillotine? Who?" shaking Mouton by his coat button.

"Why, Marat!"

"No, No, Mouton, Murat. Listen to me damn it!"

"Certainly. But Marat was a scoundrel. He betrayed the Emperor in 1815. That is why I say all papers are alike...false. Do you know what I want Rodolphe? Well...I want to see a good paper ..Not showy, mind you, but good! And to the point. There!"

"You're too exacting," interrupted Rodolphe.

"You follow me?"

"I'm trying to."

"A paper that simply records the health of the King and the good things of the world. What is the good of all your papers if nobody understands anything? Listen...I'm employed at the town-hall. I keep a register...good! If someone should come to me and say: 'Mr. Mouton, you register deaths, but do it like this or like that.' Well, what'll happen? It is the same with the newspapers," he concluded triumphantly.

"Obviously," said a neighbour who had understood.

And Mouton received the congratulations of some of the customers who shared his views. He joined his party in dominoes.

"I've put him in his place," he said indicating Rodolphe who now sat down, at the table occupied by Schaunard and Colline.

"What a blockhead!" said Rodolphe to the two men.

"He has a fine head and pleasing eyes," said Schaunard sarcastically, taking out a beautifully coloured pipe.

"I say!" said Rodolphe. "That's a pretty pipe!"

"Oh! I've better ones," said Schaunard indifferently.

"Pass me some tobacco, Colline."

"Sorry!" said the philosopher. "I've none."

"Allow me to offer you some," said Rodolphe taking out a tobacco pouch and placing it on the table.

Colline, on seeing his friend's generosity felt compelled to offer a round of drinks.

They accepted. The conversation turned to literature.

Rodolphe, questioned on his profession, which his very clothes belied, confessed that he was a poet and ordered a second round of drinks. When the waiter arrived to remove the bottle Schaunard ordered him to leave it on the table. He had heard money jingling in Colline's pockets. Rodolphe soon became expansive and conversed intimately with his friends.

If they had not been requested to leave they would probably have spent the whole night at the café. However, they left and had hardly taken ten steps on the road, it took them quarter of an hour to do so, when it began to rain heavily. Colline and Rodolphe lived at two extremities of Paris, one in Ile-Louis and the other in Montmartre. Schaunard, who had completely forgotten he had none, invited them to his rooms.

"Come with me," he said. "I live nearby. We'll spend the night discussing literature and the fine arts."

"You can play us some music and Rodolphe can read his verses," suggested Colline.

"Why, yes!" Schaunard said laughing. "Life is short."

When Schaunard arrived before his house he had some difficulty in recognising it. He sat on a stone to wait for Rodolphe and Colline who had gone into a wine merchant's shop which was still open. When they returned Schaunard rapped several times on the door vaguely remembering that the janitor usually kept him waiting. At last the door was opened, and old Durand, who had just awakened from a sleep, and who had forgotten that Schaunard was no longer a tenant of his, admitted him.

When all three had reached the top of the stairs, which they had ascended slowly and with great difficulty, Schaunard, who walked ahead, suddenly cried out in astonishment. He saw a key in the door of his room.

"What's the matter?" Rodolphe inquired.

"I don't know," mumbled Schaunard. "But I'm sure I took my key with me this morning. But now it's on my door! Anyway, let's get closer. I put my key in my pocket... Good Lord! It's still here!" he said showing them the key.

"This is magic!"

"A phantasmagoria!" said Colline.

"A dream!" added Rodolphe.

"But," said Schaunard with terror in his voice. "Do you hear?"

"What?"

"What?"

"My piano playing by itself! *nt, fa, mi ray do, la si sol, ray.* And that ray! It was always false!"

"Perhaps it isn't your room," suggested Rodolphe and

leaning heavily on Colline whispered in his ear: "He's drunk."

"I know. But it isn't a piano, it's a flute."

"Your'e drunk, too!" replied the poet to the philosopher, who now sat on the floor. It's a violine."

"A vio...? Rubbish!" Colline said holding his friend's legs. "But it's fine. He thinks it's a vio...!"

"Good Lord!" cried Schaunard now utterly terrified. "My piano's still playing. It's magic!"

"Phantas...magoria," shouted Colline dropping a bottle.

"A dream," yelled Rodolphe in his turn.

In the middle of this pandemonium the door suddenly opened. On the doorstep stood a person holding a candlestick with three red candles.

"What do you want?" he asked them cautiously.

"Heavens! What's this? I don't live here!" said Schaunard.

"Sir," said Colline and Rodolphe in unison. "Excuse my friend. He's very drunk."

Suddenly Schaunard's intoxicated mind brightened. He saw the following message written in chalk over his door:

I visited you three times for my presents. Phemie.

"No! No! This is my room!" he cried. "Here's Phemie's visiting card! This is my room!"

"Good Lord!" said Rodolphe. "I am confused."

"It isn't my fault," said Colline.

The young man could hardly suppress his laughter.

"If you'd come in for a minute," he said, "Your friend will probably realise his mistake."

"Certainly."

The poet and the philosopher, each holding Schaunard by an arm, led him into the room, or rather into what was now Marcel's palace.

Schaunard searched vaguely about the room and mumbled: "There are certainly many astonishing embellishments."

"Are you convinced, now?" Colline asked him.

But Schaunard, detecting the piano, went up and played some scales on it.

"Hey, you others! Listen!" he said thumping on some of the keys. "Just in time! That animal recognises its master!" Si las sol, fa mi ray! "Ah! that ray! It was always false. I'm certain this is my instrument."

"He insists," said Colline to Rodolphe.

"He insists," said Rodolphe to Marcel.

"And what about this?" said Schaunard, holding up the star-sprinkled garment which was thrown across a chair. "Perhaps you'll tell me this isn't my garment?"

He looked indignantly at Marcel.

"And this," he continued tearing down the bailiff's notice from the wall: He read:

"Mr. Schaunard is hereby informed that he must vacate his room, with all his things, before midday on the 8th of April. He will also pay the cost of this notice being served, which is five francs." Am I or am I not Mr. Schaunard on whom this notice has been served, and for which I am required to pay five francs? And," he continued suddenly recognising his own slippers on Marcel's feet, "aren't those my slippers? My dear Sir, I demand an explanation for your presence in my room!"

"Gentlemen," said Marcel addressing in particular Colline and Rodolphe. "I admit, it's his room."

"Ah!" exclaimed Schaunard.

"But," continued Marcel. "It is also mine."

"However," interrupted Rodolphe "if our friend..."

"Yes," continued Colline, "if our friend..."

"And if, on your part, you also feel...How can you explain...?"

"Please sit down, gentlemen," said Marcel, "and I'll clear up the mystery."

"May we have something to drink first?" hazarded Colline.

"And something to eat?" added Rodolphe.

The four of them then sat down at a table and began to eat some cold meat. And Marcel carefully explained what had happened that very morning when he had shifted into his room.

"The gentleman's perfectly in the right," said Rodolphe. "This is his room."

"You must regard it as your own," Marcel said politely.

But it was difficult to make Schaunard understand. At that moment, a comic incident occurred which very nearly complicated the whole situation further. Schaunard, searching in his cupboard for something, came across the change which Mr. Bernard had given Marcel for his 500 franc note.

"Ah! I was sure of it!" he exclaimed. "Luck never deserts me. I remember now...how I went out in search of it. It has visited me during my absence. And I left my key, on the table!"

"Sweet folly!" murmured Rodolphe watching Schaunard arrange the money in equal piles.

"Dreams! Illusions! Such is the stuff of life!" added the philosopher. Marcel laughed.

An hour later all four of them were asleep.

When they awoke the following day at midday they were surprised to find themselves together in the same room. Schaunard, Colline and Rodolphe could not remember what had

happened and spoke to one another stiffly as if they were strangers. Marcel had to explain.

Just then old Durand entered the room.

"Sir," he said to Marcel, "today is the 9th of April, 1840...the streets are dirty and Louis-Philippe is still King of France and Navarre. Heavens!" old Durand cried suddenly recognising his old tenant, "Mr. Schaunard! How did you get here?"

"By telegram," replied Schaunard.

"Please," said the janitor. "You're still the same practical joker...you...!"

"Durand," interrupted Marcel. "I don't like servants butting into my conversation. Go to the restaurant and order breakfast for four. Here is the menu. Now get out."

"Gentlemen," Marcel said to the three young men, "you gave me supper last night, allow me now to offer you breakfast, not in my room, but in yours."

And he held out his hand to Schaunard.

After breakfast Rodolphe wanted to leave.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I must now leave you..."

"Oh! No!" Schaunard exclaimed sentimentally. "We must never leave each other."

"That's right," added Colline. "And it's very nice here."

"I must leave you for a little while," explained Rodolphe. "*The Rainbow*, a fashion journal of which I am the chief editor, appears tomorrow. I have proofs to correct. I've just remembered! I have a lesson to give an Indian prince who has come to Paris to study Arabic."

"You can go tomorrow," said Marcel.

"No! No! The prince must pay me today. And then I'd certainly consider this beautiful day wasted if I didn't make a small tour round the bookstalls."

"But you'll return?" asked Schaunard.

"With the rapidity of an arrow shot by an experienced hand," replied the philosopher who loved eccentric metaphors.

He left with Rodolphe.

"Well," said Schaunard scratching his ear, "how am I going to pay Mr. Bernard?"

"But," Marcel asked uneasily, "You don't want to shift?"

"After all," Schaunard said, "I've paid my five francs."

"Then I suppose you want your furniture?"

"I have a claim on them. To quote Mr. Bernard I shall not leave even a single hair behind."

"Hell! What shall I do? I've rented your room with the furniture."

"I don't know!"

"Just a minute!" cried Marcel "I have an idea."

"Well, what?"

"Now this is the position. Legally this room is mine since I've paid for it in advance."

"The room, yes, but the furniture, if I pay up, legally belongs to me," said Schaunard.

"Then," said Marcel, "the furniture is yours but not the room, the room is mine but not the furniture."

"That's right," said Schaunard.

"I rather like this room," Marcel said.

"I hate it."

"What? Well, let's come to some sort of arrangement. You stay with me. I'll provide the room, and you the furniture."

"What about the rent?" asked Schaunard.

"As I have some money I'll pay this time, but it'll be your turn next. What do you say?"

"The proposition does not appeal to me at all. But I accept provisionally. After all music and painting are sister arts."

"Quite," agreed Marcel.

At this juncture Colline and Rodolphe returned and were informed of the compact.

"Gentlemen," said Rodolphe shaking his pockets, "I invite the whole company to dinner."

"That's precisely what I wanted to do," said Colline taking out a gold coin but immediately replacing it in his pocket. "My prince gave it to me for an Arabic grammar book costing six sous."

"And I got an advance of thirty francs," said Rodolphe, "from The Rainbow's funds on the pretext of having to get vaccinated. However, what about my invitation?"

"And mine," said Colline.

"We'll toss for it," suggested Rodolphe.

"No," said Schaunard, "I have a better suggestion."

"What?"

"Rodolphe can pay for the dinner and Colline for the supper."

"That's what I would call the wisdom of Solomon," murmured the philosopher.

They dined at a small restaurant off Dauphine street. Reminding themselves of the impending supper they ate and drank moderately.

The friendship between Colline and Schaunard, and later Marcel was now firmly established. Each of them aired his views on art and recognised the courage and hopes of the other. While chatting and discussing various things they perceived that

they had certain sympathies in common, that they all possessed an abundance of wit, which enlivened without wounding, that they had not lost their youthful virtues and that their hearts could still respond to the sight or recitation of anything beautiful. All four of them felt their meeting was something more than mere chance, that in it could be seen the hand of Providence, the natural guardian of the forsaken. Providence had brought them together and had whispered in their ears the great biblical maxim which should become the charter of humanity: "Think of and love one another."

At the end of the meal, which terminated on a grave note, Rodolphe proposed a toast to the future, and Colline replied with a short speech which, taken from no book, and unadorned, but spoken in simple and naive language, made perfectly clear what he had to say.

"This philosopher is a beast!" said Schaunard holding his head over his glass, "I'm being forced to mix water with my wine!"

After dinner they entered the cafe Momus, where after the previous evening's discussion, the customers were not so numerous. After coffee and liquers, the society of Bohemians, now definitely established returned to Marcel's room which was now known as Schaunard's Elysium. When Colline left to order the supper he had promised, the others obtained some rockets, squibs and various other crackers. Before sitting down to supper they lit them near the window and while they burst and flared the four friends sang at the top of their voices:

"Let us celebrate, let us celebrate this beautiful day!"

The next morning they found themselves together again but this time they were neither surprised nor asked for an explanation. Before each went on his own business they had a frugal breakfast at the cafe Momus, where they arranged to meet that evening and where they hoped they would meet every day for a long time to come.

These are the principal characters you will meet in this small book, which is not a novel, and pretends to be nothing more than what is implied by the title. These scenes from Bohemian Life are not meant to be studies in morality nor are the principal characters exhibited as a particularly reprehensible class of men who lead confused and disordered lives. In fact, as they themselves might maintain, confusion and disorder are a necessary part of their lives.

## CHAPTER II

### AN ENVOY FROM GOD

SCHAUNARD and Marcel, who had been labouring valiantly all

morning suddenly struck work.

"Hell! I'm hungry!" said Schaunard. Won't we breakfast today?"

Marcel appeared surprised at the question, more so since it was an inopportune one.

"Since when do we breakfast two days running?" he asked. "Besides yesterday was Thursday." And he completed his answer by writing the following words on his maul-stick: "On Friday none shall eat meat, nor anything like it."

Schaunard could find no reply to this, and therefore went on without his picture which was a plain with two solitary trees, one blue and the other red. It symbolised, with a depth of philosophy, the beauty of true friendship.

At this moment the janitor knocked on the door. He carried a letter for Marcel.

"That'll be three sous," he said.

"Quite sure?" the artist asked and slammed the door on his face.

Marcel quickly tore open the letter. After the first few words he began to somersault about the studio and sing at the top of his voice. He was transported with joy.

"If you don't keep quiet," said Schaunard who hated such lunatic behaviour, "I shall play my symphony on the influence of blue on the arts."

He approached his piano. This threat had the effect of pouring cold water into a cauldron of some boiling liquid. Marcel calmed down as if he had been enchanted.

"Look!" he said passing the letter to his friend. "Read it."

It was an invitation to dinner from an official, an enlightened patron of the arts and in particular of Marcel, who had painted his country house.

"It's for today," said Schaunard.

"Rather unfortunate it isn't for two. But I think your official is conservative. You cannot, you must not accept it! It is against all principles! You cannot eat bread stolen from the sweated millions!"

"Rot!" said Marcel, "he's a socialist. He voted against the government the other day. Besides I may get an order. And he has promised to introduce me to prominent people. Also it's Friday, I'm dreadfully hungry, and I must have some dinner."

"But there are other obstacles," said Schaunard who was jealous of this good fortune that had befallen his friend. "You cannot dine out in those clothes."

"I'll borrow from Rodolphe or Colline."

"How stupid! Have you forgotten that it's the 20th of the month and their clothes can only be found in the pawn shop?"

"I can get a suit in five hours," said Marcel.

"It took me three weeks when my cousin got married. And that was at the beginning of January!"

"Then I'll go as I am," said Mareel striding around the room. "I can't allow a miserable question of etiquette to stop me from taking what may perhaps be the most important step in my life."

"Very well," said Schaunard who enjoyed teasing his friend. "And what about shoes?"

Marcel walked out of the room in a state of agitation that would be impossible to describe.

At the end of two hours he returned with a collar.

"This is all I've been able to get," he said pitifully.

"That was hardly necessary," Schaunard replied. "I could make you a dozen collars out of paper."

"O God!" said Marcel tearing at his hair. "But I must have some clothes!"

He began to search in every nook and corner of the two rooms. After an hour's search he had gathered a pair of trousers, a grey hat, a red cravat, a white and a black glove.

"You'll need to have two black gloves," said Schaunard. "God! You'll be a strange sight when you're dressed! And you're an artist!"

Marcel tried on the shoes.

"Hell! they're odds!"

The despairing artist then espied an old shoe in a corner and immediately pounced on it.

"But one is pointed and the other square!" observed Schaunard.

"It won't be noticed when I polish them," replied Marcel.

"Oh! I'll give six years of my life and my right arm for some polish!"

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Marcel opened it.

"Mr. Schaunard?" asked a stranger.

"Yes, I'm Mr. Schaunard," said Schaunard inviting the stranger in.

"Sir," said the new arrival, one of those honest townsmen.

"My cousin has told me about your talent for portrait-painting, and as I am about to leave for the colonies, where I will represent the sugar refiners of the town of Nantes, I want to leave a souvenir of myself with my family. That's why I have come to you."

"O kindly Providence!" murmured Schaunard to himself.

"Marcel give the gentleman a chair."

## SCENES OF BOHEMIAN LIFE

"My name is Blancheron," said the stranger, "Blancheron of Nantes, representative of the sugar industry, former mayor of V..., captain of the National Guard, and author of a pamphlet on the subject of sugar."

"I am honoured, Sir, to have been chosen by you," said Schaunard, bowing before the sugar refiner's representative. "How would you like your portrait done?"

"In miniature, like this," said Mr. Blancheron showing him a portrait done in oils.

It became quite obvious to Schaunard that the man was ignorant of everything connected with the art in which he specialised, particularly, when he said he wanted his portrait in fine colours.

"And just how large would you want your portrait?" asked Schaunard.

"As large as this," replied Mr. Blancheron vaguely indicating the portrait. "May I know what your charges will be?"

"Fifty or sixty francs. Fifty without the hands, sixty with."

"Oh! my cousin told me thirty francs."

"That depends on the season," said the painter. "The price of paints vary with the season."

"Like sugar?"

"Quite."

"I'll have the fifty francs one," said Mr. Blancheron.

"But my dear sir for just ten more francs you can have your hands in the picture. I can then put in your pamphlet on the subject of sugar."

"Yes, you're right."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Schaunard to himself. "I shall burst in a minute!"

"Have you noticed?" Marcel whispered in his ear.

"What?"

"He has a black coat."

"I know. Leave it to me."

"Well, sir," said the representative. "When can you start? Soon I hope because I must leave shortly."

"I have a small journey to make myself. I must leave Paris the day after tomorrow. We can start now if you like."

"But it's getting dark," said Mr. Blancheron.

"My dear sir, my studio is built in such a way that I can work at any time of the day or night," said the artist. "If you'd take off your coat we can start."

"Take off my coat! But why?"

"Didn't you say you wanted a souvenir for your family?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Then you must wear a dressing-gown. It's the custom."

"But I haven't a dressing-gown here" protested Blancheron.

"I have one. Is that settled?" said Schaunard handing his model a ragged garment stained with paint. The townsman hesitated.

"This is a strange garment," he said.

"But a precious one," replied the painter. "A Turkish vizier presented it to Mr. Horace Vernet who gave it to me. I am his pupil."

"You are a pupil of Vernet?" asked Blancheron.

"I am. Hell!" murmured Schaunard to himself, "What blasphemy!"

"Well, that's that, young man," the stranger replied putting on the dressing gown of such wonderful origins.

"Hang the gentleman's coat on the peg," said Schaunard to his friend with a significant wink.

"Fine!" murmured Marcel holding up his booty and looking at Blancheron. "He's a good man! Will you be able to get something to eat?"

"I'll try! Don't you worry. Dress quickly and return in ten hours' time. I'll keep him here. And bring me something in your pockets."

"I'll bring you a pineapple," said Marcel leaping around the room.

He dressed hastily. The coat fitted him like a glove. He left by the second door out of the studio.

Schaunard set to work. As it grew darker, and he heard the clock strike six, Blancheron remembered that he had not dined yet. He told the painter so.

"Neither have I. To oblige you I've overlooked it, although I was invited to a house in the Faubourg-Saint-Germaine. But don't let that disturb us. The picture will be spoilt."

And he set to work again.

"In a little while," he said suddenly, "We'll be able to dine at leisure. There's an excellent cafe just outside where we can get whatever we want."

Schaunard waited for the effect of his sly use of the plural.

"That's a good idea," said Mr. Blancheron. "I would consider it an honour if you joined me."

"He's a good man!" murmured Schaunard to himself. "A real envoy from God! Would you like to see the menu?" he asked his host.

"I'll leave that to you," he replied politely.

"You won't regret it, Nicolas," the painter sang as he ran down the stairs four at a time.

He entered the restaurant went up to the counter and handed

in a menu which made the restaurant-keeper turn pale.

"And some claret" said Schaunard.

"Who's paying for it?"

"Not I obviously!" said Schaunard. "An uncle of mine, who's a real gourmet. Please hurry and serve it in half an hour—in porcelain ware."

By eight o'clock Mr. Blancheron felt an urgent impulse to pour out his views on the sugar industry and he repeated to Schaunard the whole of the pamphlet he had written. At ten Mr. Blancheron and his friend were waltzing familiarly about the room. At eleven they swore never to leave each other and each made out a will in which they bequeathed all they possessed to the other.

Marcel, when he returned at midnight, found them in each other's arms, in a pool of tears. He glanced at the table and saw the remains of what must have been a splendid feast. All the bottles stood empty.

He wanted to awaken Schaunard but realising that he may also awaken Blancheron he desisted.

"Ungrateful dog!" said Marcel taking out a handful of hazel nuts from his pocket. "And to think I brought him some dinner!"

### CHAPTER III LENTEN LOVES

ONE evening Rodolphe returned home early with the intention of sitting down to some work. But he had hardly sat at his table and dipped his pen in the inkpot when he was suddenly disturbed by a strange noise. Applying his ear to the thin partition, which separated his room from the next, he was able clearly to overhear a dialogue punctuated here and there with kisses and various other amorous sounds.

"Hell!" thought Rodolphe looking at his clock. "It's still quite early...and Juliette, my neighbour, usually keeps her lover in till the early hours of the morning. I won't be able to work tonight!"

And picking up his hat he left the room.

When he went to hand over his key he found the janitor's wife half imprisoned in the arms of a lover. The poor woman was so surprised and frightened that for fully five minutes she was unable either to speak or act.

"Well," thought Rodolphe, "I suppose even janitor's wives are sometimes human!"

When he opened the gate he saw a soldier and a kitchen-maid leaving exchanging pledges of their love.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Rodolphe. "These heretics don't

seem to remember we're in Lent!"

He followed the road which bound him to the house of one of his friends.

"If Marcel's at home," he said to himself, "we'll spend the evening discussing Colline's faults. After all we must do something..."

When he had knocked loudly on the door it was cautiously opened by a young man who was very simply attired in an eye glass and a shirt.

"You can't come in", he said.

"But why?" demanded Rodolphe.

"That's the reason!" said Marcel pointing to a feminine head which could be seen above a screen.

"Not very pretty, is she?" said Rodolphe and the door was slammed in his face.

"Oh, well" he said to himself when he gained the street.

"What am I to do now? Shall I visit Colline? Yes, we can spend the evening discussing Marcel's faults."

Crossing West street, which was usually dark and unfrequented, Rodolph suddenly espied the dark figure of a man walking sadly up and down and mumbling poetry to himself.

"Hey!" called Rodolphe. "Which sonnet is that? Hullo, Colline!"

"Hullo, Rodolphe! where are you going?"

"To your place."

"I won't be there."

"Why, what are you doing?"

"I'm waiting."

"Waiting for what?"

"Ah!" said Colline pompously, "What can a young man of twenty wait for when there are stars in the sky and music in the air?"

"Speak in prose."

"I am waiting for a woman."

"Good evening, then," said Rodolphe.

As he walked along Rodolphe continued soliloquising.

"Is today Cupid's feast? Can't I take a step without stumbling on lovers? It's positively scandalous! What are the police doing?"

As the Luxembourg was still open Rodolphe, to shorten his walk, entered it. In the middle of deserted avenues, fleeing from his footsteps, which had frightened them, he often came across mysterious couples, arm in arm, searching for what the poet has called the double luxury of silence and darkness.

"This is like an evening out of a novel," Rodolphe said. But, in spite of himself, he was caught under the languorous.

spell of the evening. He sat on a bench and stared sentimentally at the moon. In a few minutes a strange hallucination took hold of his mind. It seemed to him that the marble gods and heroes, who peopled the garden, stepped off their pedestals to pay court to their neighbours, the goddesses and heroines. And he could distinctly hear Hercules singing a madrigal to Velleda, whose dress appeared to him to be singularly short.

From the bench he could clearly see the swan in the pond gliding towards a nymph.

"Why!" said Rodolphe, who accepted all these mythological figures as living beings. "There's Jupiter keeping a tryst with Leda. But strange that this garden shouldn't disturb them!"

He rested his head on his hands and fell into an even more deeply sentimental mood. But just at that beautiful moment Rodolphe was suddenly awakened from his dream by a keeper who approached and tapped him on the shoulder.

"You must leave, sir," he said.

"Just as well," thought Rodolphe. "If I remain here five more minutes I shall be as full of sentiment as the novels of Alphonse Karr."

And pursuing his course he hastily left the Luxembourg, singing softly to himself a song which, for him, was the Marseillaise of love.

Half an hour later, he did not quite know how, he found himself in the Prado, seated before a glass of punch and talking to a young man. This young man was well known for his most singular nose, which, in profile was aquiline but viewed from the front was a snub. It was a really wonderful nose, witty and experienced enough to be able to advise others in all matters connected with love.

"Well! Well!" said Alexander Schaunard, the man with the singular nose. "So you're love sick!"

"Yes...it has taken hold of me suddenly, like a bad tooth-ache."

"Pass me the tobacco," said Alexander.

"Listen," said Rodolphe. "For the past two hours I've met nobody but lovers, pairs of men and women. I went into the Luxembourg and there I saw all sorts of hallucinations. But it has stirred my heart in the most extraordinary manner. I bleated and cooed having been transformed into half a sheep and half a pigeon. I have both wool and feathers on me."

"What have you been drinking?" Alexander asked impatiently.

"I assure you I'm perfectly sober," said Rodolphe. "And yet again, no. I'm longing to embrace someone. You know, Alexander, a man cannot live alone. In a word, I want you to

help find me a wife... We'll make a tour of the saloons and the first woman I point out, you must go up and tell her I love her."

"Why don't you tell her yourself?" said Alexander in his fine nasal voice.

"Oh! No!" said Rodolphe. "I've suddenly forgotten how to say such things. In all my romances my friends have always written the preface, and sometimes the end. I've never known how to start."

"The end is all you need know," said Schaunard. "But I understand. I know a girl who likes the oboe. You may suit her."

"Ah!" said Rodolphe, "I hope she has blue eyes and white gloves."

"Hell! Blue eyes! I didn't say...but gloves...you know you cannot have everything! Anyway let's go into the aristocratic quarter."

"Wait," said Rodolphe as they entered an elegant saloon. "That's a pretty girl..." And he pointed to a fashionably dressed young girl standing in a corner.

"Good!" replied Alexander. "You stay here while I go up and speak to her. When it's arranged...I'll call you."

For about ten minutes Alexander spoke to the young lady, who, from time to time, burst into joyous laughter and ended by throwing Rodolphe an elegant smile which seemed to say: "Come, your advocate has won your case."

"Come on," said Alexander, "victory is yours. She's quite a simple young thing."

"Leave that to me."

"Pass me some tobacco," said Alexander, "and then you can sit with her."

"Dear me!" said the young girl when Rodolphe sooted himself at her side. "Your friend is funny! His voice sounds like a hunting-horn!"

"He's a musician," replied Rodolphe.

Two hours later Rodolphe and his companion stopped before a house on Saint-Denis street.

"I live here," said the young girl.

"When and where can I see you again Louise?"

"In your house tomorrow evening, at eight o'clock."

"You promise?"

"I promise," the young girl said and held out to be kissed her cheeks which to Rodolphe seemed like those two beautiful fruits of life, youth and health.

Rodolphe returned home drunk with joy.

"Ah!" he said surveying his room. "I must compose some

verses."

Then next morning when the janitor came up to his room he found thirty sheets of paper at the head of which was written the following line:

"O Love! Love! Fountain head of youth!"

Rodolphe awoke early and, although he had slept little, immediately jumped out of bed.

"Today is the great day," he said. "But twelve hours to wait! How shall I spend that eternity of time?"

And as he glanced at his desk his pen seemed to jump about as if to say: "Work!"

"Yes, work! And to hell with prose...Oh I cannot stay here!...that ink stinks!" He installed himself in a café where he was sure he would meet none of his friends.

After a good meal he ran for a train and jumped into a compartment. In half an hour he was in the woods of Ville d'Avray. He walked all day through the woods, feeling a new man in this contact with nature, and did not return to Paris till nightfall.

Having put in order the temple in which he was to receive his idol, Rodolphe attired himself carefully, regretting the while that he could not dress in white. Between seven and eight o'clock he was in a state of feverish expectancy, a slow anguish that recalled his former affairs and the women who had attracted him. Then, as was his usual habit, he dreamed of a great love affair, an affair in six volumes, a veritable lyric poem with moonlight, setting suns, trysts under the willow trees, jealousies, heavy sighs and endless waiting. It was thus women came into his life and none had left without an aureole around her head and a necklace of tears.

"They prefer a hat or shoes," his friends told him.

But Rodolphe was obstinate and so far his numerous blunders had not sufficed to teach him a lesson. He was still waiting for a woman who wanted to be idolised, an angel in velvet robes, to whom he could read the sonnets he had written on the leaves of the willow tree.

At last Rodolphe heard the sacred hour strike, and, as the last stroke echoed through the room, he thought he saw Love and Psyche, who surmounted his clock, entwine their alabaster bodies. At the same instant he heard two timid knocks on his door.

Rodolphe opened it. It was Louise.

"I've kept my word," she said.

Rodolphe closed the screens and lit a new candle.

During this time the young girl took off her shawl and hat and placed them on the bed. The splendid whiteness of the

linen made her smile and then blush.

Louise was as graceful as she was pretty. Her fresh face was a lively mixture of childish simplicity and roguishness. It was something like a design by Greuze arranged by Gavarni. All the winning youthfulness of the young girl was cleverly emphasised by an attire which, although simple, yet revealed that innate science of coquetry which all women possess from the moment they wear their swaddling clothes to the time when they put on their wedding dress. Besides, Louise appeared, particularly, to have studied the art of posing. Standing before Rodolphe, who examined her with artistic appreciation, she revealed a crowd of seductive poses, which nevertheless, were more graceful than natural. Her well shod feet possessed a satisfying slenderness...even for a romantic in love with the miniatures of the Chinese and Andalusians. As to her hands, they were beautifully delicate attesting their idleness. In fact for the past six months she had never feared even the prick of a needle. In truth Louise was one of those fickle and flighty creatures who, whenever the whim takes them, make their homes for a day or a night in some corner of the Latin Quarter and only leave when caprice moves them or the discovery of a ribbon.

After, having talked for about an hour with her, Rodolphe showed Louise his group of Love and Psyche.

"Isn't it Paul and Virginia?" she asked.

"Yes," said Rodolphe who did not want to contradict her.

"They're well copied," replied Louise.

"Alas!" thought Rodolphe. "I'm afraid the poor child has hardly read any literature. She must only obey the orthography of her heart which does not use an S in the plural. I'll buy her a Thomond."

When Louise complained of her feet being cramped Rodolphe helped her to unlace her shoes.

Suddenly the light was extinguished.

"Heavens!" cried Rodolphe, "Who put the candle out?"

A happy burst of laughter was the reply.

Some days later Rodolphe met one of his friends in the street.

"What have you been doing?" he asked, "I haven't seen you for ages."

"I'm writing poetry," replied Rodolphe.

The unfortunate man spoke the truth. He had demanded of Louise what the poor child could never have given him. You cannot obtain the music of a lyre from a bagpipe. She spoke only the language of love which Rodolphe did not understand.

Eight days later, in the same saloon where she had met Rodolphe, Louise met a blond young man who danced, with

her several times and at the end of the evening took her to his home. He was a second year student, loved pleasure, had beautiful eyes and a full purse.

Louise asked him for some paper and ink and wrote the following note to Rodolphe:

"Think no more of me. For the last time, 'good-bye. Louis."

When Rodolphe read the note on his return that evening the light within him suddenly died.

"Well," said Rodolphe reflectively, "The candle I lit the evening Louise came is out. She has ended our liaison. I wish I had known. I might have chosen a longer one." And his voice contained an equal mixture of pity and regret. The note he deposited in a box under his mattress which he called the catacomb of his loves.

One day at Marcel's Rodolphe picked up a piece of paper with which to light his pipe and recognised on it the writing and spelling of Louise.

"I have," he said, "the autograph of the same person. Only there are two less faults than in mine. Does that prove she loves more than you?"

"It proves that you are a simpleton," replied Marcel "White shoulders and white arms have no use for grammar."

#### CHAPTER IV

##### RODOLPHE ALI OR THE TURK FROM NECESSITY

OSTRACISED by an inhospitable landlord Rodolphe had for some time been living an errant life. He had brought to perfection the art of going to bed without supper or supping without going to bed. Chance was his litchen and he frequently lodged at the inn of the Beautiful Stars.

However, even in these harassing days, Rodolphe had not abandoned two things, his good humour and the manuscript of *The Avenger*, a drama which had been submitted to every conceivable theatrical society in Paris.

But suddenly one day Rodolphe came face to face with an uncle of his, a Mr. Monetti, stove-repairer, sergeant of the National Guards, whom Rodolphe had not seen for an eternity.

Touched by the unfortunate circumstances of his nephew, uncle Monetti promised to try and ameliorate his condition, and we are now going to see how if the reader is not frightened of a six storey ascent.

Let us then take the stairs and climb. Poof! A hundred and twenty-five steps! We have arrived. One more step and we shall be in the room, the like of which we cannot hope to see elsewhere. It is small but high and for the rest airy, with

a beautiful view.

The furniture is composed of stoves of all descriptions, which cannot be lit, two frying-pans, a dozen or so pipes of clay and iron and a crowd of other similar apparatus. To conclude the inventory, there was a hammock suspended from two nails on the wall, a garden chair with an amputated leg, an ornamental candlestick and various other such fantastic knick-knacks and objects d'arts.

As for the balcony it contained two dwarfed cypress trees, in pots which transformed it into a park to be used during the summer.

At the moment we enter, the host of the place, a young man dressed like a Turk in some comic opera fashion, is eating a meal which is an affront to the Prophet's law consisting as it did of ham and wine. His repast over, the young Turk stretched himself, in oriental fashion, on a divan and gave himself nonchalantly to the Asiatic pleasure of smoking a narghile. From time to time he passed his hand over the back of a magnificent Newfoundland dog which certainly would have been more responsive to his caresses if it had been in warmer place.

Suddenly the noise of footsteps is heard in the corridor, the door opened, giving entrance to a man who, without uttering a word, walked up to one of the stoves, opened the lid and, taking out a roll of papers, examined it with attention.

"What!" said the newcomer with a Piedmontese accent. "You still haven't completed the chapter on Cuppings?"

"My dear uncle," replied the Turk, "The chapter on Cuppings is one of the most interesting of your works and demands careful study. I'm studying it."

"But you always give me the same excuse. And the chapter on Hot-air Stoves?"

"It's going well. In that connection, my dear uncle, I think it would be nice if you gave me some wood. This place is a miniature Siberia. I'm sure the temperature must be below zero."

"But you've already used a log."

"My dear uncle, there are logs and logs and that was a small one."

"I'll bring you one of my economical logs. That will warm the room."

"That's precisely what it doesn't do!"

"Very well," said the Piedmontese withdrawing. "I'll get you a log. But I must have the chapter on Hot-air Stoves."

"When the fire's lit, I'll be inspired," said the Turk.

As you may perhaps have already guessed our hero is not what he appears to be. After all a turban does not make a

Turk. The young man is our old friend Rodolphe actually being forced by his uncle to write his Manual on the Perfect Stove-Repairer. Mr. Monetti was passionately fond of his art and consecrated his life to stoves. He had always dreamed of formulating a code, for the use of future generations, on the principles of the art in which he excelled. He had therefore, as we are aware, chosen his nephew to enshrine in a single volume his fund of ideas on the subject. Rodolphe was fed, lodged and so forth and, on the completion of the Manual would receive the sum of a hundred crowns.

After the first few Monetti, in order to encourage his nephew, had generously advanced him fifty francs. But Rodolphe, who had never set eyes on such a sum for more than a year, ran away half mad, with the crowns and did not return for three days. He returned on the fourth, without the crowns. Monetti who was impatient to see his Manual completed, expecting as he did to receive a diploma, feared that his nephew may escape again. Therefore to force him to work he had removed all his clothes and left in their place the disguise in which we have recently met him.

Nevertheless, the famous Manual progressed slowly. Rodolphe hated all such types of literature. Out of revenge for this indifference towards stoves his uncle heaped all sorts of miseries on his poor nephew. He sometimes deprived him of food and often of tobacco.

One Sunday, after having laboriously expended blood and ink on the famous chapter on Hot-air Stoves, Rodolphe broke his pen, cutting his fingers, and went out for a walk in the park.

As if to annoy him and excite his envy he could not glance in any direction without seeing a smoking figure at all the windows.

On the gilded balcony of a new house a dandy in a dressing gown chewed an aristocratic looking pipe between his teeth. In the storey below an artist drove away the odorous fog of some eastern tobacco which burned in an amber bowl. At the window of a small restaurant a fat German, with a frothing tankard of beer before him, was fanning aside the opaque clouds which escaped from his Cudmer pipe. On another side groups of workers crossed a gate with pipes in their mouths. In fact all the pedestrians who filled the the street were smoking.

"Alas!" cried Rodolphe enviously, "With the exception of myself and my uncle's stoves everybody in the world seems to be smoking."

And Rodolphe, his head on the railings of the balcony, contemplated the bitterness of life.

Suddenly he heard a burst of laughter and he leaned over

the balcony to discover where this foolish volley of joy had come from. Suddenly he realised that he had been seen by the tenant in the storey below, a Miss Sidonie, a young actress of the Luxembourg theatre.

Miss Sidonie came out on her terrace rolling between her fingers, with Castillian skill, a small piece of paper swollen with tobacco she had extracted from a velvet embroidered bag.

"O beautiful tobacco!" murmured Rodolphe with thoughtful adoration.

"Who is this Ali Baba?" thought the young Miss Sidonie in her turn.

And she thought what excuse she might find to engage Rodolphe in conversation while a similar idea occupied Rodolphe's mind.

"O dear!" cried Miss Sidonie as if she were talking to herself. "How annoying! I have not matches!"

"Won't you allow me to offer you some?" said Rodolphe. And he dropped two or three sticks rolled in paper, on the balcony.

"A thousand thanks!" said Miss Sidonie lighting her cigarette.

"My dear lady..." Rodolphe hesitated, "in exchange for the small service my good angel has permitted me to do, dare I ask you...?"

"Demands already!" thought Miss Sidonie. Ah! These Turks! They are said to be fickle but nice. "Yes," she said looking attentively at Rodolphe, "what do you want?"

"Please give a little tobacco. It's two days since I've smoked. A pipeful only..."

"With pleasure. But how? If you could come down..."

"Alas! That's impossible! I've been locked in. But we could try an experiment..." said Rodolphe.

He attached his pipe to a thread and let it down to the balcony where Miss Sidonie herself filled it to the brim. Rodolphe then proceeded, with calm and circumspection, to pull up his pipe which reached him without mishap.

"Ah!" he said to Miss Sidonie, "How much better this pipe would taste if it had been lit with the fire in your eyes!"

Though such flattery has been pronounced a hundred times over Miss Sidonie did not find it the less superb for that.

"You flatter me!" she replied.

"Dear lady, you are, I assure you as beautiful to me as the three Graces."

"Ali Baba is decidedly a gallant," thought Miss Sidonie.

"Are you really a Turk?" she asked Rodolphe.

"Not by choice," he replied, "but by necessity. I'm a

playwright.

"And I'm an actress."

Then she added:.

"Would you do me the honour of dining with me this evening?"

"Oh! Dear lady, though that proposal is heaven itself I can't possibly accept it. As I've already had the honour to tell you I've been locked in by my uncle, Mr. Monetti, a stove-repairer, whose secretary I am."

"You shall dine with me," replied Miss Sidonie. "Listen... I'll go into my room and knock at my ceiling. If you look in that spot you'll find the traces of a peep-hole which has since been blocked up. Try and remove the piece of wood which blocks the hole and we can be together..."

Rodolphe set to work immediately. In five minutes, communication was established between the two rooms.

"The hole is small," Rodolphe said. "But it's enough to enable me to pass you my heart."

"Now we can dine..." said Miss Sidonie. "Lay the cloth and I'll pass you the plates."

Rodolphe let his turban down attached to a string and pulled it up again filled with food. Then the poet and the actress sat down to dine, each in his own room. Rodolphe devoured the pie with his teeth and Miss Sidonie with her eyes.

"Thanks to you," said Rodolphe when he had finished the meal, "my stomach is satisfied. Do you think you could similarly satisfy the hunger of my heart which has fasted for so long?"

"Poor boy!" said Miss Sidonie.

And climbing a table she held out her hand to his lips and he covered it with kisses.

"What a pity," cried the young man, "you can't climb up here like Saint Dennis who could carry his head in his hands."

The dinner over they started a half amorous, half literary conversation. Rodolphe spoke of *The Avenger* and Miss Sidonie asked him to read it to her. Leaning over the brink of the hole, Rodolphe began reading his drama to the actress, who, to enable her to hear better, sat on a chair which balanced on the chest of drawers. Miss Sidonie declared *The Avenger* to be a masterpiece and as she had influence in the theatre she promised to try and have it accepted.

At a most tender moment in the conversation uncle Monetti's light footsteps were heard in the corridor. Rodolphe just had time to close the peep-hole.

"Here's a letter," Monetti said to his nephew. "It has been following you about for a month."

"Let me see," said Rodolphe. "My dear uncle, I'm rich!"

This letter informs me that I've won a prize of three hundred francs at an Academy of Floral Games. Quick, my clothes! They await me at the Capital!"

"And my chapter on Hot-air Stoves?" asked Monetti coldly.

"It irritates me! Give me my clothes. I cannot go out in these..."

"You will leave only when my Manual is completed," said the uncle and locked Rodolphe in again.

Left alone Rodolphe did not spend much time thinking out his next move. He firmly tied a sheet to the balcony and, in spite of his perilous decent, he gained, with the aid of this improvised ladder, Miss Sidonie's terrace.

"Who's there?" she cried on hearing Rodolphe's knocking.

"Quiet," he replied, "open..."

"What do you want? Who are you?"

"Must you know? I'm the author of *The Avenger* and I've come to pick up my heart which I dropped through the peep-hole."

"Unhappy young man!" said the actress, "You might have killed yourself!"

"Listen,, Sidonie..." continued Rodolphe showing her the letter he had received. "You see, fortune and glory smile on me!... That love could also!..."

The following morning, with the help of a disguise Sidonie furnished him, Rodolphe escaped from his uncle's house. He ran to his correspondent of the Academy of Floral Games to receive his golden eglantine of a hundred crowns.

A month later Mr. Monetti had agreed, in collaboration with his nephew, to assist in the first presentation of *The Avenger*. Thanks to the talent of Miss Sidonie the play ran seventeen times and brought forty francs to its author.

## CHAPTER V

### CHARLEMAGNE'S CROWN

TOWARDS the end of December the officials of the administration of Bidault were charged with the distribution, in their neighbourhood, of a hundred cards a copy of which we here faithfully and truly reproduce:

Messrs. Rodolphe and Marcel  
request the pleasure of your company at their house next Saturday, Christmas eve. Let us be merry!

P.S. We have such a short time to live!

## PROGRAMME.

7 o'clock. Opening of the saloons. Lively and animated conversation.

8 o'clock. Entrance and presentation of the witty authors of *The Sleeping Mountain*, a comedy refused by the Odeon theatre.

8-30 o'clock. Mr. Alexander Schaunard, a distinguished artist, will execute on the piano the *Influence of Blue on the Arts*, an imitative Symphony.

9 o'clock. First lecture of *Mémoire* on the abolition of suffering in tragedy.

9-30 o'clock. Mr. Gustave Colline, natural philosopher, and Mr. Schaunard will initiate a discussion on comparative philosophy and politics. In order to avoid a clash the two antagonists will attack each other.

10 o'clock. Mr. Tristan, man of letters, will relate his first loves. Mr. Alexander Schaunard will accompany him on the piano.

10-30 o'clock. Second lecture of *Mémoire* on the abolition of suffering in tragedy.

11 o'clock. Description of a cassowary hunt by a foreign prince.

## SECOND PART

Midnight. Mr. Marcel, historical painter, will, with only white chalk, and his eyes bandaged, execute the interview between Napoleon and Voltaire in the Champs-Élysées. At the same time Mr. Rodolphe will execute a parallel interview between the author of *The Battle of Austerlitz* and the author of *Zaire*.

12-30 o'clock. Mr. Gustave Colline, in a state of modest undress, will give an imitation of the games of the 4th Olympiad.

1 o'clock. Third lecture of *Mémoire* on the abolition of suffering in tragedy, followed by a collection for tragic authors who will one day find themselves out of work.

2 o'clock. Opening of gambling room and organisation of quadrilles, which will continue till morning.

6 o'clock. Sunrise. Final song.

During the entire programme fans will play.

N.B. All persons who may wish to read or recite any verses will be immediately taken outside and handed over to the police. It is also requested that nobody brings rotten eggs or tomatoes.

Two days later copies of this programme were in circulation among all classes of literary and artistic people and started a profound rumour.

Nevertheless among the invited there were some who were suspicious about the splendours announced by the two friends.

"I'm rather suspicious," said one of the sceptics. "I've sometimes been to Rodolphe's on Wednesday's and I can tell you we only sat silently and drank filtered water."

"This time it will be different," said another. "Marcel has shown me the programme which promises to be good."

"Will there be any women?"

"Yes, Phamie Tienturiere has asked to be queen of the evening and Schaunard will bring some fashionable women..."

And here, in a few words, is how the entertainment originated causing a great stir in the Bohemian world which cannot usually see beyond its nose. For about a year now Marcel and Rodolphe had announced their sumptuous entertainment which was always to take place next Saturday. But due to unfortunate circumstances it had continually to be postponed. The result was they could not take a step without having to face the irony of their friends some of whom were indiscreet enough to protest against it. In time the whole thing became a bore and the two friends resolved to put end to it. This was how the invitations came to be issued.

"We cannot withdraw now," said Rodolphe. "We've burnt our boats. We have eight days before us in which to find a hundred francs, indispensable if we are to do everything well."

"Then we shall have them," Marcel replied. And with the firm confidence they had in chance the two friends went to sleep as if the hundred francs were already on their way to them, the impossible way.

However, on the day before the eve of the feast, as nothing had arrived, Rodolphe thought he would help chance a little, if he did not want to be insulted when the day of the entertainment dawned. To make things easier the two friends began progressively to modify their sumptuous programme.

Making modification after modification, cutting down the provision of cakes and the supply of refreshments the two friends reduced the total expense to fifteen francs.

The whole matter was no doubt simplified, but it was still unsolved.

"Now, let's see," said Rodolphe. "In the first place we

cannot postpone it this time."

"Impossible" agreed Marcel.

"How long is it since I've listened to the recitation of the Battle of Studzianka?"

"Nearly two months."

"Two months. Good. My uncle will forgive me for such honest delay. I'll listen tomorrow to the Battle of Studzianka. That will be five francs."

"And I," said Marcel, "I'll sell the Abandoned Manor to old Medicis. That's another five francs. If I have sufficient time I'll put in three more turrets and a mill which will make it worth six francs. We'll have our money."

And the two friends slept dreaming that Princess Belgiojoso begged of them to postpone the date of the entertainment as she would not be able to bring some of her friends.

And then the great morning arrived. Marcel got hold of a canvas and quickly proceeded with his construction of the abandoned Manor a picture which had been particularly demanded of him by a second hand dealer in the Carrousal. Rodolphe on his part visited his uncle Monettie. Monettie excelled in the recitation of the Retreat from Russia for listening to which, five or six times a year, Rodolphe was given a loan. Nor did the veteran stove-repairer stint him the money. He knew that his nephew listened to him with enthusiasm and that gave him the greatest pleasure.

Two hours later Marcel, his head bowed, and carrying a canvas under his arm, met Rodolphe returning from his uncle's house. His whole attitude revealed bad news.

"Well," said Marcel, "have you been successful?"

"No, my uncle has gone to the Versailles museum. And you?"

"That ass Medicis doesn't want the Abandoned Manor. He wants the Bombardment of Tanger."

"Our reputation's gone if we don't hold our entertainment," murmured Rodolphe. "What will our influential critic think?"

And they re-entered their studio their minds a prey to the most uncomfortable thoughts.

At this moment a neighbouring clock struck the hour of four..

"We have only three hours before us," said Rodolphe.

"But," cried Marcel approaching his friend, "are you quite sure we have no money in here?"

"Neither here nor anywhere else. What money?"

"If we look under the furniture...in the sofa chair? We'll suppose that refugees hid their treasures here in Ropespierre's time. Who knows!...Perhaps our sofa-chair belonged to a refugee. It's so hard the idea has often struck me that it may

be made of metal...shall we examine it?

"This is farcical," replied Rodolphe his tone a mixture of severity and indulgence.

Suddenly Marcel, who had undertaken to search every corner of the studio, cried out in triumph.

"We're saved!" he cried. "I was sure there were treasures here...Look!" And he showed Rodolphe a coin as large as a crown half covered with rust and verdigris.

It was a Carolingian coin of some artistic value. On the well-preserved inscription one could read the date of Charlemagne's reign.

"That's worth thirty sous," said Rodolphe glancing scornfully at his friend's coin.

"Thirty sous put to good use can be made to go a long way," replied Marcel. "With twelve hundred men Bonaparte defeated ten thousand Austrians. Skill is better than quantity. I'm going to change Charlemagne's crown at Medicis'. But are there any more things here to sell? If I took the ashes of Jaconowski's tibia our capital would be made up."

"Take it. But I don't like it. We won't have a single object d'art."

During Marcel's absence Rodolphe definitely decided to hold the entertainment and went to find his friend Colline, the natural philosopher, who lived nearby.

"I've come," he said to him, "to ask you to do me a service. In my capacity as master of ceremonies it is absolutely essential that I have a black coat.. and...as I haven't one...you must lend me yours."

"But," said Colline hesitating, "as a guest I need a black coat myself."

"You can wear a cloak."

"I've never had a cloak, you know that."

"Well, listen...either you won't come to the entertainment or you'll lend me your coat."

"This is awful. I'm on the programme and will be missed."

"They will miss many other things besides," said Rodolphe.

"Lend me your black coat, and if you want to come, come as you like...even with a serviette over your arm...you can pass for a servant."

"Oh! No!" said Colline turning red. "I'll wear my overcoat. But I don't like it at all." And when he saw Rodolphe already in his famous black coat, he cried "Wait...there are a few things in it."

Colline's coat deserves some attention. In the first place it was completely blue and it was more out of habit that it was

called black. And as he was the only one in the company who possessed such a coat even his friends adopted the habit and when speaking of the philosopher's official article of clothing would be heard to say: "Colline's black coat." Besides it had a particular shape, the most bizarre one could hope to see. It had long sleeves and a very short tail with two pockets, which were veritable gulfs, in which Colline was in the habit of stuffing about twenty volumes which he always carried about with him.

The result was his friends said that, when the libraries were closed, scholars and men of letters always find their reference books in Colline's coat, a library which was always open.

On this extraordinary day Colline's coat contained only a quarto volume of Bayle, a treatise on natural philosophy in three volumes, a volume of Condillac, two volumes of Swedenbourg, and Pope's Essay on man. When he had removed these books from the coat pocket he allowed Rodolphe to put it on.

"But the left pocket is still heavy," said Rodolphe. "You've left something behind."

"Yes," said Colline, "That's right. I've forgotten to empty out the pocket of foreign languages." And he drew out two Arabic grammars, a Malayan dictionary and The Perfect Cowherd in Chinese, his favourite reading.

When he returned home Rodolphe found Marcel playing quoits with three five franc coins. He would not accept the hand which his friend extended towards him. He felt it to be steeped in crime.

"Quick! Quick!" said Marcel. "We have fifteen francs. I met an antiquary at Medicis'. When he saw my coin he was very nearly ill. It was the only one missing in his collection. He had searched all over the world to fill in the blank but had given up all hope. And when he saw my Charlemagne he offered me five francs without the slightest hesitation. But Medicis nudged my elbow and his look completed the rest. We want shares in the sale which realised thirty francs and here's the rest. Now our guests can come and we can give them the most splendid things. You've got a black coat?"

"Yes," said Rodolphe, "Colline's coat." And as he searched in a pocket for a handkerchief he discovered another volume on some foreign language.

The two friends immediately proceeded to make the necessary preparations. They re-arranged the whole studio. They put some fire in the stove. From the roof they suspended a framework set with candles which they disguised to look like a chandelier. In the middle of the studio they placed a table for the operators and before it the unique sofa-chair which was to be occupied by the influential critic. On the table they

placed all kinds of books, novels, poems and the articles of authors who were to honour the evening's entertainment with their presence. In order to avoid a clash between the different groups of literary men the studio was divided into four compartments at the entrance to each of which one could read the following, hastily written on boards :

Poet's Corner.  
Prose writer's Corner.

Romanticists.  
Classicists.

The ladies were to occupy the space in the centre.

"There aren't enough chairs," said Rodolphe.

"We can put them along the wall, if we can get them !"

"We must get some," said Rodolphe going out to borrow some from a neighbour.

At six o'clock the two friends dined hastily and returning, proceeded to light up the saloons. They were quite fascinated with their own work. At seven o'clock Schaunard arrived accompanied by two ladies who had forgotten to wear their diamonds and their hats. One of them had a red shawl speckled with black. Schaunard particularly recommended her to Rodolphe.

"She's a very suitable lady," said Schaunard. "An English-woman whom the fall of the Stuarts has sent into exile. She lives a very modest life, and gives English lessons. Her father was a Chancellor under Cromwell, at least so she told me. You must be very polite with her...no familiarity !"

Numerous footsteps could be heard on the stairs. The guests were arriving. They were astonished to see a fire in the stove.

Rodolphe, in his black coat, went up to the ladies and kissed their hands with princely grace. When about twenty persons had assembled Schaunard asked if a round of something was going to be served.

"Immediately," said Marcel, "We are waiting for the arrival of the influential critic to light the punch."

At eight o'clock all the guests were complete and the programme commenced. Each item was alternated with a round of something, they never knew quite what.

At about ten o'clock they saw the white waistcoat of the influential critic appear. He remained only for an hour and seemed entirely absorbed with his own thoughts.

Towards midnight the wood finished and as it was cold the guests who had chairs began to use them for the fire.

At one o'clock everyone had left.

A friendly gaiety had throughout reigned among the guests. And there were no regrettable incidents except perhaps for a slight hitch with the foreign language pocket of Colline's black coat and a box on ear which Schaunard gave the daughter of Cromwell's Chancellor.

This memorable evening was the subject of conversation for the next eight days in the neighbourhood and Phemie Teinturiere, who had been the queen of the evening could often be heard telling her friends: "It was proudly beautiful. There were candles, my dear."

6

## CHAPTER VI

### MISS MUSETTE

MISS MUSETTE was a pretty girl of twenty who, a little after her arrival in Paris, had become what all pretty girls sooner or later become if they possess a fine figure, much coquetry, a little ambition and less learning. For a long time she was the joy of all diners in the Latin Quarter, where she sang with a voice that was always attractive, if not quite good, a crowd of country songs for which she became famous. But suddenly one day she left Harp Street for the heights of Breda Quarter.

It did not take her long to become one of the most sought after ladies among the aristocracy of pleasure, and little by little she was able to achieve that celebrity which consists in being referred to in letters and the lithographs of stamp-engravers.

Nevertheless Miss Musette was an exception to the usual run of women with whom she found herself. Instinctively elegant and poetic, as all women who call themselves women should be, she loved luxury and all the enjoyment it brought. In her coquetry was the ardent desire for all that was beautiful and noble. A commoner she was never out of place in the most royal surroundings. But Miss Musette, who was young and beautiful, would never consent to be mistress to a young man who was not, like herself, young and beautiful. She had been known once to stoutly refuse the offer of an old man who was so rich that he had come to be known as the Prince of Chaussée-d'Antin. Intelligent and witty she held in contempt all fools and simpletons, age, titles and names.

Musette was then a splendid and beautiful girl and in love she adopted part of the famous aphorism of Champfort which says, that love is the exchange of two dreams. Also, it may, be said, never have her love affairs been preceded by one of

those shameful agreements which dishonours all modern affairs. As she herself has said she is frank and sincere in all her relations.

But if these ideas were lively and spontaneous they were never tangible enough to reach the height of passion. And her excessively capricious temperament which took little notice of the purses and the outward appearance of those who sought to make love to her, lent her life a singular mobility so that she always alternated between the coupés and omnibuses, the ~~cabriolet~~ <sup>coaches</sup> and the fifth storey, and silk robes and rags. What a charming girl! She is a living poem of youth, laughter and joyous song. O Miss Musette! You, who are the sister of Bernerette and Mimi Pinson, it would need the pen of Alfred de Musset to describe your insouciance and vagabond life on the road of youth! And he certainly would have wanted to make you famous particularly if, like me, he had ever heard you sing, in that attractively false voice of yours, a rustic couplet from one of your famous songs.

The story we are now going to relate is one of the most charming episodes in the life of this beautiful adventuress who has been responsible for so many young men taking their young lives.

At the time she was the mistress of a young councillor of state, who had gallantly placed in her hands the key to the whole of his patrimony, Miss Musette was in the habit of holding a weekly party at her small but pretty home on Bruyère road. These parties resembled, for the most part, any Parisian party but with one amusing difference. When the room was not sufficient the guests were permitted to sit in each other's laps and it often happened that the same glass served for a couple. Rodolphe, who was an acquaintance of Musette, and who was never seen anywhere without his friend Marcel, asked her permission to bring him to one of her parties. He assured her that he was a painter of great talent and was destined to be an academician.

"Bring him!" said Musette.

On the evening of one of Musette's parties Rodolphe went to his friend Marcel's home to take him along. The artist was dressing.

"What!" said Rodolphe, "Are you going to wear that coloured shirt?"

"Why, is it offensive?" Marcel asked him calmly.

"Offensive? Unfortunately...yes."

"Hell!" said Marcel staring at his shirt which was a deep blue with Vignettes representing wild boars being pursued by hounds, "But I have nothing else! Anyway I'll wear a false

? collar and with Mathuslah buttoned at the neck they won't see the colour of my shirt."

"What!" said Rodolphe uneasily, "are you wearing your Mathuslah?"

"What am I to do?" replied Marcel. "Both God and my tailor desire it. Besides, it has been trimmed with new buttons and I have mended it with black thread."

Mathuslah was only Marcel's coat. He had named it thus because it was the oldest article in his wardrobe. Four years ago it may have been fashionable but it was now obsolete. Besides it was an atrocious green though Marcel affirmed that under the light it looked black.

In five minutes Marcel was ready. He was dressed in the most perfect bad taste particularly for an art student about to enter society.

Nothing astonished Rodolphe and Marcel, but Mr. Casimir Bonjour had never been so astonished since his election to the Institute as when he arrived at Musette's house. He had reason to be. Miss Musette, who for some time had been quarrelling with her lover, the councillor of state, had finally come to be abandoned by him at the most critical moment. Pursued by her creditors and her landlord her furniture had been seized and shifted out into the courtyard to await their final disposal. But in spite of this incident Miss Musette had no intention of being separated from her guests and did not revoke her invitations. As if nothing had happened she arranged the courtyard, placed a carpet on the pavement and prepared everything as usual. She dressed to receive her guests and later God contributed his share by supplying the illuminations.

It was an enormous success. Never had Musette's parties been so gay and animated. While the porters were slowly removing the furniture, the carpet and the divans the whole company danced and sang until in the end they were all forced to retire.

Musette saw all her friends off and only Marcel and Rodolphe remained. She went up to her room which contained merely a bedstead.

"Oh Dear!" she exclaimed, "I don't feel quite so gay now! I'll have to live in the Hotel of Beautiful Stars. I know that hotel. The most furious winds blow there!"

"My dear lady," said Marcel, "If I had the gifts of Pluto I would offer you a temple more beautiful than that of Solomon, but..."

"You aren't Pluto, my friend. It's all right. I know your intentions are good...Dear me!" she added running over her room with a glance, "But I was bored here and the furniture

was old. "I've been here nearly six months!"

As Rodolphe had won some money at lansquenet during the evening he took Musette and Marcel to a small restaurant.

After breakfast the three friends, who had no desire to go to bed, spoke of spending the day in the country and when they found themselves near a railway station they got into the first train about to leave and disembarked at Saint-Germain.

All day they roamed about the woods and did not return to Paris till nearly seven in the evening in spite of Marcel who wanted to remain on till midnight because, as he said, life was so short and time was not to be wasted.

During the party and the whole of the next day Marcel, whose heart was like saltpetre which a single glance could set alight, had gradually fallen in love with Miss Musette. He had very nearly proposed to the beautiful girl that, with the money he would realise on the sale of his famous picture crossing the Red Sea, he would buy her furniture superior to the old. Besides the artist dreaded the moment when he would have to part from Musette, who, although she allowed her hands, neck and a few other parts of her anatomy to be kissed, guarded herself against the more passionate advances of the artist.

When they arrived in Paris Rodolphe left his friend behind with the young girl who invited the artist to see her to her door.

"You'll permit me to come and see you?" asked Marcel, "I'll paint your portrait."

"My dear," said the pretty girl, "I cannot give you my address. I don't know where I may be tomorrow. But I'll see you and mend that large hole in your coat!"

"I'll wait for you like the Messiah."

"Not so long then!" said Musette laughing.

"What a charming girl!" said Marcel as he walked away. "She's the goddess of gaiety herself. I'll tear another hole in my coat!"

He had not taken more than thirty steps when someone tapped him on the shoulder. It was Musette.

"Marcel dear," she said, "are you a French cavalier?"

"Of course I am. Here's my emblem."

"Then noble lord," said Musette who had a smattering of literature, "pity me and relieve my pain. My landlord has taken the key of my apartment and it's now eleven o'clock. You understand?"

"I understand," replied Marcel offering his arm to Musette. He conducted her to his studio.

Musette, half asleep, and clasping Marcel's hand said:

"Remember your promise?"

"O Musette!" Marcel replied emotionally. "You are here

under an hospitable roof. Sleep in peace. Good night. I'm going."

"But why?" said Musette her eyes closed. "I'm not afraid, I assure you. There are two rooms. I'll sleep on your couch."

"My couch is too hard to sleep on. It's full of pebbles. You can stay in my room and I'll go to a friend of mine who lives on the same landing. It's wiser. I'm a man of honour but I'm twenty two years old and you're eighteen...O Musette! ...I'm going...good night!"

The next morning, at eight o'clock, Marcel entered his room, a pot of flowers, which he had bought in the market, in his hands. He found Musette lying still asleep on the bed. Hearing him she awoke and held out her hand to him. "Honest boy!" she said.

"Honest boy," repeated Marcel. "Are you making fun of me?"

"Oh!" said Musette. "What have I said? It wasn't nice of me. For my wickedness give me those pretty flowers."

"It is for you," said Marcel, "And in return for my hospitality sing me one of your pretty songs. My roof may perhaps retain the echo of your voice so that I could still hear it when you have gone."

"Do you want me to go?" asked Musette. "And if I don't want to leave? Listen, Marcel, we'll be frank with one another. You please me and I please you. That's not love but at any rate it's the seed. Well, I'm not leaving. I'm staying and I shall stay as long as those flowers don't fade."

"But they'll be dead in two days!" said Marcel, "If I had only known I would have made them immortal!"

For fifteen days Marcel and Musette lived the most charming life in the world although they often found themselves without money. Musette held for the artist a tenderness which he had never experienced before and he began to fear that his mistress did not love him seriously. Ignorant of the fact that she herself feared his love for her was waning he looked at the flowers each morning the death of which would mean the break up of their romance. But with each new day their freshness remained. He soon discovered the key to the mystery. One night when he awoke he found Musette missing next to him. When he ran into the next room he saw her watering the flowers which she had done every night while he was asleep.

## CHAPTER VII

### ON THE BILLOWS OF WEALTH

MARCH 19...It was a date Rodolphe could never forget because on the same day, St. Joseph's day, he went out at three o'clock to look for a banker who would lend him five hundred francs in ringing coins.

The first result of this large slice of wealth which fell to Rodolphe was not that his debts were paid but that he promised himself to observe certain economies in his life and not waste money unnecessarily. He had some extremely arresting ideas on the subject and said that having hitherto dreamt of the superfluous it was time he occupied himself with the necessary. That is one reason why he did not pay his creditors but bought a Turkish pipe which he had long coveted.

Furnished with this gift he made his way to Marcel's house where he had been living for some time. As he entered the artist's studio his pockets jingled like a village bell on a great feast day. Hearing the unaccustomed noise Marcel thought it must be one of his neighbours, a speculator, counting his day's gains.

"There's that rogue again," murmured Marcel to himself. "If this noise goes on I shall have to give notice. How can I work in such an uproar? But it makes me think, It makes me feel I should give up this poor life of an artist."

And without for the moment thinking that it was his friend Rodolphe metamorphosed into Croesus he sat to work on his picture crossing the Red Sea which had been on the easel for three years.

Rodolphe who had not said a word suddenly thought of a trick to play on his friend.

"This is going to be fun!" he murmured, "Lord what it is to be able to laugh!"

As he spoke he dropped a five franc coin on the ground.

Marcel lifting up his eyes saw Rodolphe who was as serious as an article in *The Review of Two Worlds*.

The artist picked up the coin with a self-satisfied air and made a very gracious greeting. Like a good art student he knew how to behave and was particularly civil to strangers. For the rest, knowing that his friend had gone out in search of money and now realising that he had been successful he accepted and admired the result without questioning him on the means by which he had obtained it.

Without saying a word he set to work again and drowned

an Egyptian in the Red Sea. As he was accomplishing his homicide Rodolphe dropped another five franc coin. He closely observed the reaction on the Painter's face and laughed into his beard, which was multicoloured, as has been said.

At the ringing sound of the metal Marcel, as if struck by an electric shock, suddenly got up and shouted :

"What! A second coin?"

A third coin rolled on the floor, then another and yet another. At last a whole quadrille of coins danced on the floor.

Marcel began to show signs of mental disequilibrium and Rodolphe laughed like the audience of the Theatre-Francais on the first night of Jean of Flanders. Then suddenly, without caution, Rodolphe dug his hands into his pockets and the crowns steeplechased fabulously about the floor. It was the flood of gold, the bacchanal of Jupiter entering heaven.

Marcel was dumb, rooted, his eyes fixed. Astonishment metamorphosed him as curiosity had formerly victimised the wife of Lot. And as Rodolphe threw the last of his five hundred francs on the floor the artist had already reached the brink of lunacy.

Rodolphe laughed. And beside this stormy hilarity of his the thunders of Mr. Sa's orchestra seemed like an infant's sighs at the breast.

Dazzled, speechless, stupified with emotion, Marcel thought he must be dreaming. And to drive the nightmare away he dug his fingers into him until he had a shout out with pain. He realised at last that he was quite awake and seeing the gold at his feet he cried out as in some tragedy :

"I can't believe my eyes."

Then taking Rodolphe's hand in his he asked :

"What's the explanation of this mystery?"

"I can't explain it to you."

"But why?"

"This gold is the result of my toil," said Rodolphe gathering and arranging the money on a table. Then withdrawing a few paces he respectfully considered the piles of coins and murmured to himself :

"Have I now realised my dreams?"

"There must be nearly six thousand francs," said Marcel contemplating the money. "I've got an idea. I shall make Rodolphe buy my Crossing the Red Sea."

Suddenly Rodolphe posed theatrically and with great solemnity in both gesture and voice addressed the artist thus :

"Listen Marcel. The fortune which now shines before your eyes is not the result of dishonest manoeuvres. I have not trafficked with my pen. I am rich, but honest. That gold has

been given me by a generous hand and I have promised to utilise it in acquiring, by hard work, the position of an honest and virtuous man. Work is good."

"And the horse is the noblest of animals," interrupted Marcel. "What's the significance of this discourse of yours? And where did you acquire those atrocious sentiments? From the School of Good Sense?"

"Don't interrupt me and no more of your tomfoolery," said Rodolphe. "Besides, from henceforth, I shall be guarded against you by the shield of my invulnerable will."

"That's enough for the prologue. What comes next?"

"These are my firm intentions. To shelter myself against the embarrassing circumstances of life I am going to work seriously in future. Firstly, I am renouncing Bohemia. I will dress like everybody else, buy a black coat, and visit the saloons. If you wish to follow in my footsteps we can continue to live together. But you must adopt my programme. The strictest economy will rule my life. And in observing it we can live and work for three months without the slightest disturbance. But economy is necessary."

"My friend," said Marcel, "Economy is a science which only the rich can practice. People like us can ignore the first principles. Nevertheless for six francs we can buy the works of Jean-Baptiste Say, a very distinguished economist. He will instruct us in the practise of this art...Oh! you've bought a Turkish pipe?"

"Yes," said Rodolphe, "I bought it for twenty-five francs."

"You paid twenty-five francs for a pipe?...And you talk of economy?"

"Certainly," replied Rodolphe. "I break a two sous pipe everyday. At the end of a year that constitutes an expense greater than I can bear...It's certainly an economy."

"Yes," said Marcel, "you're right. I didn't think of that."

At this moment a neighbouring clock struck six.

"Let's dine quickly," said Rodolphe, "I want to start from this evening. With regard to dinner I have an idea. Everyday we lose precious time in eating in restaurants. Time means money to workers. We must economise. We'll dine in town to day."

"Yes," said Marcel, "twenty paces from here there is an excellent restaurant. It's a little expensive but as it is so close so we can save time."

"We'll go there today," said Rodolphe, "But from tomorrow and the following days it would be advisable for us to adopt another economical measure...instead of going to restaurants we'll do our own cooking."

"No! No!" interrupted Marcel, "we'll engage a servant who can at the same time do our cooking. That's much better. In the first place our housekeeping will always be done. Our shoes will be polished, my brushes cleaned and our marketing done. I shall even try to inculcate in him a taste for the fine arts and make him my pupil. In this way we can save at least six hours a day from unnecessary cares and tribulations which would be detrimental to our work."

"Yes!" agreed Rodolphe. "And I have another suggestion...but let's dine first."

Five minutes later the two friends were installed in one of the cubicles of the neighbouring restaurant where they continued to devise economies.

"This is my suggestion," said Rodolphe.

"What if we get a mistress instead of a servant?"

"A mistress for two!" exclaimed Marcel shocked. "That would be economy carried to the point of prodigality! And we shall only waste money buying knives with which to kill each other. Impossible!"

"Very well, then," said Rodolphe "But we must engage an intelligent man. I can instruct him."

"Yes. He can be a resource in our old age," said Marcel totalling up the bills which amounted to fifteen francs. "Gracious! This is expensive. We usually dine on thirty sous."

"No doubt," said Rodolphe, "but we dine badly and are obliged to have supper later. Everything considered it's an economy."

"Quite true," murmured the artist vanquished by such reasoning. "You're always right. Do we work this evening?"

"Good Lord, no! I'm going to see my uncle. He's an earnest man. I will inform him of my new position and he'll give me some good advice. What about you, where are you going?"

"I? I'm going to see old Medicis. He may have some old pictures for me to restore. Give me five francs."

"Why?"

"To cross the Arts bridge."

"But that's a wasteful expense. I told you we must economise."

"Sorry, my mistake," said Marcel. "I'll cross the Neuf bridge...but I'll take a cab."

The two friends then parted each taking different route which, by a singular chance, led them to the same spot, where they met again.

"You haven't seen your uncle?" asked Marcel.

"You haven't seen Medicis?" asked Rodolphe.

And they burst out laughing.

Nevertheless they returned home early...the next day.

Two days later Marcel and Rodolphe were completely transformed. Dressed both of them like bridegrooms, they looked so handsome, so re-splendent, so elegant that when they met in the street they had some difficulty in recognising each other.

Their system of economies was in full vigour, but the organisation of work had hardly been fully realised. They had engaged a servant. He was a tall man, thirty-four years of age, of Swiss origin and an intelligence that recalled that of Jocrisse. He was not born to be a servant, and when one of his masters entrusted him with a rather obvious parcel to carry, he turned red with indignation and immediately engaged a porter. But, it must be admitted, Baptiste had his good points. If they gave him a hare he was able to turn it into an appetising stew. Moreover, having been a distiller before becoming a valet, he had conceived a great passion for his art and spent a great part of his time, which should have been devoted to his masters, in searching for a new and superior vulnerary to which he hoped to give his name. But where Baptiste really had no rival was in making walnut liquor and smoking Marcel's cigars, which he lit with Rodolphe's manuscripts.

One day Marcel wanted him to pose in Pharaoh's costume for his picture Crossing the Red Sea. Baptiste categorically refused and demanded his wages.

"Very well," said Marcel, "you can have them this evening."

When Rodolphe returned he told him that it was time they dismissed Baptiste. He was absolutely useless to them.

"He's just a living statue," declared Marcel.

"He's a beast."

"He's lazy."

"We must dismiss him."

"But he has his good points. He makes excellent hare-stew."

"And walnut liquor. He's the Raphael of walnut liquor."

"I agree. But that isn't enough. And we lose all our time in discussions with him. He is the cause of my not being able to complete my Crossing the Red Sea for the saloon. He has refused to pose for Pharaoh."

"Thanks to him, I haven't completed my own work. He won't go to the library for the notes I need."

"He'll ruin us."

"Decidedly. We cannot keep him."

"We must dismiss him...but then we must pay him."

"We shall pay him. Give me the money."

"The money! But I don't keep the money, you do."

"Not at all, you do. You're the manager," said Rodolphe.

"But I assure you I have no money!" exclaimed Marcel.

"Don't tell me there's nothing left? It's impossible! We can't spend five hundred francs in eight days, particularly when we have lived, as we have lived, with absolute economy and limited ourselves to strict necessities. We must verify our accounts. There must be some mistake."

"Quite right," said Marcel, "but I'm sure we won't find any money left. Anyway, we'll consult the account book."

"19th March," Marcel read, "Received 500 francs. Expenses: one Turkish pipe, 25 francs; Dinner 15 francs; Diverse expenses 40 francs."

"What are those diverse expenses? demanded Rodolphe.

"You know quite well," Marcel replied. "It was the evening we did not return till the next morning. Besides we bought some wood and candles."

"All right. Continue."

"20th March. Breakfast, 1 franc 50 centimes. Tobacco, 20 centimes. Dinner, 2 francs. An eye-glass, 2 francs 50 centimes. Oh! That's to your account. You didn't need an eye-glass? You can see perfectly..."

"You know very well the nature of my work in *L'Echarpe d'Iris*. It's impossible to pass criticisms on painters without an eye-glass. It's a legitimate expense. And then...?"

"A *maître* cane..."

"Ah! that's to your account! You don't need a cane?"

"Those are our expenses for the 20th," replied Marcel avoiding the question. "On the 21st we breakfasted in town, dined also and had supper as well."

"We didn't spend much that day, did we?"

"In fact very little...hardly 30 francs."

"But on what?"

"I don't know," replied Marcel, "It's marked down under the heading 'Diverse expenses.'"

A vague and perfidious heading!" interrupted Rodolphe.

"22nd. It's the day Baptiste joined us. We gave him an advance of five francs for his livery. To the barrel-organ, 50 centimes. For the redemption of four small Chinese children condemned to be thrown into the river Jaune by parents of unbelievable barbarity, 2 francs 40 centimes."

"Just a minute," interrupted Rodolphe, "What necessity was there to save those small Chinese children? They would have been better off in the water."

"I was born generous," replied Marcel. "But let's conti-

nue. So far we seem to have practised no economy. 23rd. No expenses. 24th. Ditto. Two good days. 25th. Advanced to Baptiste 3 francs. We seem to have advanced him money quite often," Marcel added reflectively.

"Then we owe him less," replied Rodolphe. "Continue."

"26th March. Diverse expenses useful from the point of view of art, 36 francs 40 centimes."

"What useful things did we buy?" demanded Rodolphe.

"I don't remember. What could have cost 31 francs 40 centimes?"

"How do I know?...It was the day we climbed the tower of Notre Dame to get a bird's eye view of Paris."

"But it costs only 8 sous to climb the tower," said Rodolphe.

"But when we came down we dined at Saint-Germain."

"This audit makes things very clear."

"27th. No expenses."

"Ah! That's economy!"

"28th. Advanced Baptiste 6 francs on his wages."

"Ah! This time I'm sure we owe Baptiste nothing. It looks as if he may owe us...We shall see."

"29th. There is no account kept. It has been replaced by the beginning of an article on morality. 30th. We had everybody over to dinner. Many expenses. 30 francs 55 centimes. 31st. Today. No expenses to record. You see the accounts have been kept exactly. But it doesn't total 500 francs."

"Then it must be in the drawer."

"I'll see," said Marcel, opening the drawer. "No. There's nothing here. Only a spider."

"A morning spider means sorrow," said Rodolphe.

"Where the devil has so much money gone?" demanded Marcel, looking at the empty drawer.

"Heaven! I know!" said Rodolphe, "Baptiste has taken it all!"

"Wait a minute," said Marcel searching in the drawer where he found a piece of paper. "Last month's receipt!"

"How did it get there?"

"Didn't you pay the landlord?"

"I? Certainly not!" said Rodolphe.

"However..."

"But I assure you..."

"What is then the mystery?" the two sang together after the final air of the White Lady.

Baptiste, who loved music, joined them.

Marcel showed him the receipt.

"Ah! Yes!" said Baptiste indifferently. "I forgot to tell

you. The landlord came this morning when you were out, and I paid him to spare him the trouble of returning."

"And where did you get money?"

"Oh! Sir!" said Baptiste, "I took it from the drawer which was open. I thought it was left open with that object. I said to myself. 'My masters forgot to tell me when they went out, 'Baptiste, the landlord may come while we're out. You pay him'. And I did so as if you had commanded me...without having been commanded."

"Baptiste," said Marcel turning white with anger "You have exceeded our orders. From today you don't belong to this household. Give up your livery."

Baptiste removed his starched cap and handed it to Marcel.

"Good", said Marcel, "and now you can go..."

"But my wages?"

"What are you talking about, you fool? You have received more than we owe you. I have given you 14 francs in hardly fifteen days. How much more money do you want? Have you got a mistress?"

"You are going to forsake me then," cried the unhappy servant, "And I have no shelter for my head!"

"Take your livery back," said Marcel moved in spite of himself.

He handed the cap to Baptiste.

"Nevertheless," said Rodolphe watching poor Baptiste walk out, "It is he who has stolen our fortune. But where shall we dine today?"

"We shall know tomorrow," replied Marcel.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE VALUE OF TEN FRANCS

ONE Saturday evening, when he was no longer living with Miss Mimi, whom we shall soon meet, Rodolphe came to know a certain Miss Laure who dealt in toilet requisites. Having discovered that Rodolphe was editor in chief of *L'Echarpe d'Iris* and *Castor*, two fashion journals, the modiste, with the hope of creating a demand for her products, made a crowd of enticing overtures to him. Rodolphe responded with magnificent, if false, passion. Towards the end of dinner Miss Laure having learnt that Rodolphe was also a poet, clearly made him understand that she was not averse to making him her Petrarch. She even arranged, without unnecessary circumlocution, a rendez-vous with him for the next day.

"Lord!" said Rodolphe to himself, when conducting Miss

Laure home, "She is certainly a friendly person! Besides she's intelligent and dresses well. I want to make her happy."

When they arrived at the door of her house Miss Laure, disentangling herself from Rodolphe's arm, thanked him for the trouble he had taken to see her to such a distant quarter.

"Madam," said Rodolphe making a low bow, "I wish you lived in Moscow or the Sunda islands because then I could be your cavalier longer."

"It is distant," replied Laure with affectation.

"We should have gone by the boulevards," said Rodolphe. "Let me kiss you now," he continued and putting his arms round her endeavoured to kiss her on the lips.

Laure resisted.

"Oh! No!" she exclaimed, "You're going too fast!"

"We'll arrive at our destination sooner!" replied Rodolphe.

"In love the preliminary stages must always be surmounted at a gallop."

"What a fool!" thought the modiste entering her house.

"A beautiful woman!" thought Rodolphe walking along the street.

Returning home he went hastily to bed and dreamed the sweetest dreams. On his arm at balls, at the theatre and the boulevards he saw Miss Laure resplendent in clothes which might be envied by the coquettes of *Peau d'Ane*.

The next day at eleven o'clock, as was his habit, Rodolphe awoke. His first thought was of Miss Laure.

"She's a fine woman," he murmured. "I'm sure she must have been educated in Saint-Denis. At long last I shall have a mistress who does not know the miseries of poverty. Of course, I'll make sacrifices for her. I'll give her gloves and take her to restaurants where they give us serviettes. But I'm afraid my coat isn't very good," he added while dressing.

And he left for the offices of *L'Echarpe d'Iris*. Crossing the street he met an omnibus on the panels of which was pasted the following notice:

Today. Saturday. Waters at Versailles.

If thunder had fallen at Rodolphe's feet it could not have caused a more profound impression on him than the sight of this notice.

"Saturday! God! I'd forgotten!" he cried to himself. "I won't be able to get any money. Today is Saturday!! And all the crowds in Paris will be on their way to Versailles!"

But impelled by one of those fabulous hopes to which man always clings, Rodolphe ran to his office praying that some happy chance would find the cashier in.

In fact Mr. Boniface had come. But had only stayed for an instant having left almost immediately.

"He's gone to Versailles," the office boy said.

"Well, that's that," said Rodolphe, "But I only have to meet her this evening. It's midday now. I have five hours in which to find ten francs, 20 sous the hour, like the horses in the Boulogne woods! Forward."

Finding himself in the quarter in which the man whom he called the influential critic lived he thought he could press him for a loan.

"He's sure to be at home," he said climbing the staircase. "It's the day for his article. I'll borrow ten francs from him."

"Oh! It's you!" said the man of letters as soon as he saw Rodolphe. "You've come at the right moment. I want you to do me a small favour."

"And so do I!" thought the editor of the *L'Echarpe d'Iris*

"Were you, at the Odeon yesterday?"

"I am always at the Odeon."

"You've seen the new play then?"

"Who else would have seen it? I am the Odeon's public."

"That's quite true," said the critic. "You're one of the pillars of that theatre. Anyway this is what I want you to do. Give me an account of the new play."

"That's simple. I have a creditor's memory."

"Whose play is it?" demanded the critic while he continued to write.

"That of a gentleman."

"That's being too hard "

"Not harder than a Turk surely."

"Ah! No! The Turks you must know have usurped such a reputation by force. They cannot be savoyards."

"But why not?"

"Because all Savoyards are Auvergnats and Auvergnats are porters. Besides there are no longer any Turks except at masked balls and in the Champs-Élysées where they sell dates. The Turk is a presumption. I have a friend who knows the east well. He assures me all the nations are to be found in Coquenard Street..."

"That's very pretty, what you said just now," said Rodolphe.

"You think so?" said the critic. "I'll put it in my article then."

"Very well, this is my analysis. It is straight forward," said Rodolphe.

"Yes, but that's not enough."

"Well it should find a place while you're putting in the hyphens and developing your criticism."

"I have hardly any time and there's no room for my criticism."

"But can't you introduce a long appreciation of the play into your analysis?" demanded the critic.

"Right," said Rodolphe, "I have good ideas on tragedy but I must warn you that they have already been published three times in the *Castor* and *L'Echarpe d'Iris*."

"That doesn't matter. How many lines will it take?"

"Forty lines."

"Heavens! You certainly have great ideas! Anyway, give them to me."

"Good," thought Rodolphe, he cannot now refuse to lend me ten francs. "But I must inform you," he told the critic, "that my ideas are not new. They are slightly threadbare at the elbows. Before publishing them I shouted them in all the cafés in Paris. There isn't a waiter who doesn't know them by heart."

"Is there anything new in the world except virtue?"

"Well, there you are," said Rodolphe when he had finished.

"Hell! it still lacks two columns...How am I to fill in that abyss!" cried the critic. "Can't you furnish me with some paradoxes while you're still here?"

"I have none with me," said Rodolphe. "But I can lend you some. Only they are not mine. I bought them for fifty centimes from one of my friends who was in trouble. But they are quite new."

"Good!" said the critic.

Rodolphe started writing again.

"I'm certainly going to ask him for ten francs. In these days paradoxes are as expensive as patridges."

He then wrote some thirty lines of nonsense on pianos, gold fish, common sense and Rhine wine which he called a toilet-room wine.

"Very pretty indeed!" exclaimed the critic.

"Now you can add that honest people can only be found in prison."

"But why?"

"To fill up two lines. That's good!"

The influential critic called his servant and sent his article away to the publisher's.

"This is where I make my thrust!" said Rodolphe and, with much gravity, he made his demand known to the critic.

"Dear me!" said the critic, "I haven't a sou here. Lalotte, who ruins me with her demands for pomade, has plundered me of all I had and gone to Versailles to see the Nyads and the

stone monsters vomiting liquid."

"To Versailles! Is this an epidemic?" asked Rodolphe.

"But why do you need money?"

"I have to meet a lady this evening at five o'clock," replied Rodolphe. "She's a very distinguished person and only travels in an omnibus. I want to take her about for a few days to let her taste the sweetness of life. You know, dinners, dances, promenades, etc. etc. I must have ten francs. If I don't French literature will be shamed."

"Why don't you borrow from her?" suggested the critic.

"Much too soon! I'm taking her out for the first time. Only you can help me."

"By all the mummies of Egypt I assure you I haven't enough money to buy even a pipe for a sou. But I have some books you can sell."

"Impossible. It's Saturday today. Mother Mansut, Lebigre and all the piscinas of the quays and Saint Jaques Street are closed. But what books have you got? Volumes of poetry with a portrait of the author in glasses? Those are not bought!"

"At least the Assize Court hasn't condemned them," said the critic. "Just a minute. Here are some songs and concerts tickets. If you're clever you can get some money on them."

"I would prefer something else...trousers for instance!"

"Here you are," said the critic, "take this Bossnet and this plaster of Mr. Odilon Barrot. That's the proverbial widow's last mite."

"At any rate you give them with goodwill," said Rodolphe. "I'll take your treasures, but if I get thirty sous for them it will be equal to Hercules' third labour!"

After having trudged the neighbourhood for about four miles Rodolphe, with the help of eloquence he was able to summon from some secret source on these great occasions, was at last able to dispose of the volumes of poetry, the songs and the bust of Mr. Barrot to his laundress for two francs.

"Well," he said, "now that I've got the sauce I must get the food. I'll see my uncle!"

Half an hour later he was with his uncle who was able to read what he had come for on his nephew's face. He spoke very guardedly and met every demand with a series of recriminations against the world.

"The times are hard," he said, "bread is expensive, creditors are tightfisted, rents are high and business poor." And all the other hypocritical litinies of tradesmen.

"Would you believe" said the uncle, "that I was forced to borrow of my shop boy to pay a bill?"

"You should have asked me," said Rodolphe, "I would have

lent you the money. Three days ago I had two hundred francs."

"Thank you, my boy, but you need it...And while you're here, since you have such a beautiful hand, you can copy out some bills I have to send out."

"These ten francs are going to be very expensive," said Rodolphe sitting down to his task.

"I know you're a great lover of music, uncle," he said to Monetti, "I've brought you some concert tickets."

"Good boy. Will you dine with me?"

"Thanks, uncle, but I'm dining at Faubourg Saint-Germain. But I don't know what to do. I haven't time to go home for some money for a pair of gloves."

"You have no gloves? Shall I lend you mine?"

"I'm afraid they won't fit me. If you could only lend me..."

"Twenty-nine sous to buy them? Certainly my boy, here you are. When one goes into the world one should be well dressed. Better to be envied than pitied, as your aunt used to say. I would have given you more but it's all I have in the cash-box. It means I'll have to climb those infernal stairs and I cannot leave the shop with customers always coming in."

"I thought you said business was bad?"

Uncle Monetti appeared not to hear and, while his nephew was pocketing the twenty-nine sous, he said:

"Don't hurry to return them."

"What a miser!" said Rodolphe making escape. "But I still need thirty-one sous. Where shall I find them? I'll go to the crossroads of Providence."

This was the name Rodolphe had given the most central point of Paris, namely, the Palais-Royal, where it is impossible to remain for ten minutes without meeting someone you knew, particularly creditors. Rodolphe posted himself near the steps of the Palais-Royal. Providence seemed to be slow in coming. At last Rodolphe saw it. He wore a white hat, a green overcoat and carried a gold topped cane...a kindly Providence.

He was an obliging and rich boy although he was a phalansterian.

"I'm delighted to see you," he said to Rodolphe, "Walk with me and we can chat."

Rodolphe got into steps alongside the white hatted phalansterian.

When they approached the bridge of Arts Rodolphe said to his companion:

"I must leave you now. I can't pay the toll."

"Come on," the other said holding Rodolphe back and throwing two sous to the pensioner.

"Now is the time," thought the editor of *L'Echarpe d'Iris*



crossing the bridge. He stopped before the Institute's clock tower and pointing with a desperate gesture to the clock, cried:

"Heavens! Quarter to five! I'm undone!"

"What's wrong?" asked his astonished companion.

"I nearly forgot! I have an appointment."

"Is it important?"

"I should think so. I have to go for some money...to Batignolles. I'll never do it...What shall I do?"

"That's simple!" said phalansterian, "Come home with me. I'll give you the money."

"Impossible! You live in Montrouge and I have some business in Chanssee d'Antin...Damn it!..."

"I have some sous on me," Providence timidly say, "But very little I'm afraid."

"Perhaps if I took a cab I'll arrive in time at Batignolles."

"This is all I have in my purse, thirty one sous."

"Give it to me quickly!" Rodolphe said as the clock struck five. He hastened to the rendezvous.

"It has certainly been hard to get," said Rodolphe counting his money. "A hundred sous and I'm well dressed. Laure will know she is dealing with a man who can live. It's left to me to rehabilitate the position of men of letters who only lack money to be rich."

Rodolphe found Miss Laure already at the appointed rendezvous.

"She's early!" he said to himself.

He spent the evening with her and courageously melted his ten francs away in the crucible of prodigality. Miss Laure was enchanted by his manners and was careful to see that he did not enter her room when he saw her home.

That's my only fault," she said.

"Madame," said Rodolphe, "I am known for my constancy. All my friends are astonished at my fidelity and call me the General Bertrand of love."

## CHAPTER IX WHITE VIOLETS

ABOUT this time Rodolphe fell in love with his cousin Angèle who hated him, and the engineering knight's thermometer was about twelve degrees below zero.

Miss Angèle was the daughter of Mr. Monetti, of whom we have already had occasion to speak. She was eighteen years of age and had just returned from Bourgogne where she had spent five years with a relation who was to will her fortune to

her on her death. This relation was an old woman who had never been either young or beautiful but who had always been wicked, though religious. Angèle, when she had first gone, was a charming child whose adolescence already carried the promise of a charming youth; but on her return after five years she had changed into a beautiful but cold, prim and indifferent person. The retired provincial life, the practices of a severe faith, the mean principles of the education she had received had filled her mind with vulgar and absurd prejudices, narrowed her imagination and limited her heart to an organ which merely functioned as a balance. Angèle had, so to speak, holy water instead of blood running in her veins. She greeted her cousin with glacial reserve and he, poor man, wasted much of his precious time trying to awaken in her the tender cord of past scenes when they had been in love with each other in the traditional relationship between cousins. Nevertheless Rodolphe was enamoured of his cousin Angèle, who hated him. And one day, having discovered that the young girl was to attend the wedding of one of her friends, he was encouraged to the point of promising Angèle a bouquet of violets. Having obtained her father's permission Angèle accepted her cousin's offer but instead they should be white violets.

Rodolphe, happy over his cousin's friendliness, frisked about and hummed to himself as he returned to his Mount-Saint-Bernard. That was what he called his room. We shall soon see why. As he crossed the Palais-Royal he passed the shop of Madam Provost, the famous florist and he entered to enquire the price. A presentable bouquet cost not less than ten francs, but there were some which cost more.

"Heavens!" said Rodolphe. "Ten francs and eight days in which to find them. That will be difficult. But my cousin shall have her bouquet. I have an idea."

This incident took place during the literary genesis of Rodolphe.

He had no other source of income than a pension of fifteen francs a month granted to him by one of his friends, a great poet who, after a long sojourn in Paris, had become, with the help of a patron, a provincial school master. Rodolphe, who was as prodigal as a god-mother, spent his pension in four days, and as he did not wish to abandon the sacred and unproductive profession of an elegaic poet he lived, for the rest of the month, on the chance manna which falls slowly from the baskets of Providence. This enforced lent did not disturb him. He got through it gaily, thanks to a stoical sobriety and those treasures of the imagination which helped him to reach the first of the month, when his Easter fast was terminated. Rodolphe now

lived on Contrescarpe-Saint Marcel Street in a large building often known as the Grey Eminence because Father Joseph, the damned soul of Richelieu, had lived there, so it was said. Rodolphe lived on the top of this house which was one of the highest in Paris. His room, built like a turret, was fine in the summer but, from October to April, it was a 'minor Kamtschatka. The four winds which blew through his four windows, each of which contained numerous holes, executed a sort of wild quartet during the whole of the winter. Ironically enough there was a fire place whose immense gaping mouth seemed to have been an entrance of honour reserved for Boreas and his followers. With the first signs of cold Rodolphe had recourse to a very singular system of heating the room. He would draw upon the few pieces of furniture he possessed until at the end of eight days his room would be considerably emptied. Only his bedstead and two chairs would remain. These were, of course, of iron and were naturally insured against incendiarism. This heating system Rodolphe called "shifting through the chimney."

It was the month of January and the thermometer, which was twelve degrees on the quay Lunettes, would have been two or three more degrees if it had been transported to Rodolphe's turret, which he had nicknamed Mount Saint-Bernard, Spitzberg or Siberia.

On the evening Rodolphe had promised his cousin, the white violets he was made very angry when he returned to his room. The four winds had again broken a pane in his window and were playing about in all the four corners of his room. This was the third mishap of its kind in fifteen days. Rodolphe was in a furious rage. After having stuffed this new breach with the portrait of one of his friends Rodolphe lay fully dressed on the two boards he called his mattress, and dreamed all night of white violets.

At the end of five days he had still not found the means with which he could realise his dream and on the day after he would have to give his cousin the boquet. The temperature again went down several degrees and the poet dispaired of ever obtaining the violets, the price of which would have risen. But Providence at last took pity on him, and (this is how he came to receive its help.

One morning Rodolphe thought he would ask his friend Marcel, the painter to breakfast with him. He found him in conversation with a woman in mourning. She belonged to the neighbourhood and had recently lost her husband. She had come to enquire how much Marcel would want to paint a man's hand on the tomb of her late husband with the following inscrip-

tion :

I AWAIT THEE, MY DARLING HUSBAND.

She had even told the Artist that, when God called her to join her husband, she wanted a second hand, her own, with a bracelet with another inscription :

AT LAST WE ARE REUNITED.

"This clause will be included in my will," said the widow, "and only you will know what has to be done."

"Very well," replied the artist, "I accept your price...but with a hope, the hope that you won't forget me in your will."

"I want it done as soon as possible," said the widow. "But take your time and don't forget the scar on the thumb. I want a living hand."

"It will speak, Madam, you needn't fear," said Marcel conducting the widow out. But she had hardly gone when she returned again.

"I have another request to make," the widow said : "I want some verses on my husband's tomb to relate his good conduct and the last words he spoke on his death bed. Is that permissible?"

"Oh! Yes! That's called an epitaph. It's quite permissible!"

"Do you know anyone who will do it cheaply for me? There's my neighbour Mr. Guérin, a writer, but he'll want too much."

Here Rodolphe winked at Marcel who immediately understood.

"Madam," said Marcel waving a hand towards Rodolphe, "chance has happily brought the very person who can help you in these unhappy circumstances. He is a distinguished poet, you cannot find a better one."

"I want something sad," said the widow, "and in good verses."

"Madame," replied Marcel, "my friend has everything at his finger tips. He won all the prizes at college."

"My nephew has also won a prize," said the widow. "He is only seven years old."

"He must be a precocious child," replied Marcel.

"But," said the widow, "can the gentleman write sad verses?"

"Better than anyone I know, Madam, because his own life has been a sad one. He excels in sad verses. It is what the

papers always reproach him for."

"Well I never!" cried the widow. "Do they write about him in the papers? He must be as good as Mr. Guérin."

"Oh! Better! Speak to him, Madam, you won't regret it."

After having explained to the poet the kind of verses she wanted to inscribe on her husband's tomb the widow said she would give him ten francs if she was satisfied with them.

"I shall compose the best verses for you!" said Rodolphe when she had gone. "Good old woman! I hope you live for a hundred and seven years!"

"I don't agree!" said Marcel.

"Oh! I forgot! You have her hand to paint when she dies! You'll lose money if she lives too long!" Then lifting up his hands in supplication he said: "O God, I withdraw my request! I'm glad I came here."

"What did you want?" demanded Marcel.

"Well, now that I shall have to spend the night composing these verses I have come to ask you, firstly, for dinner, secondly, for some tobacco, and a candle-stick and thirdly, for your white bear-skin coat."

"Are you going to a masked ball?"

"No. The truth is I am as cold and frozen as the great army which retreated from Russia. Of course, my green coat and Scottish trousers are very pretty but they are only good for the equator. When one lives in the north pole, like me, a white bear-skin coat is more convenient, I will even say urgently desirable."

"You'll feel like a loaf of bread in an oven," said Marcel.

But Rodolphe had already donned the white bear-skin coat.

"You're not going out like that?" demanded Marcel.

They had an extremely cheap and dubious dinner which was served to them in vessels stamped ten centimes.

When he returned home, not without first having frightened the janitor, the poet lit the candlestick and surrounded it with some transparent paper to protect it from the malicious intentions of the north wind. He set to work immediately. But it was not long before he discovered that, if his body was warm, his hands were not. He had hardly written two verses of his epitaph when a ferocious numbness assailed his fingers and he dropped his pen.

"The most courageous man cannot fight against the elements," Rodolphe said dropping defeated into a chair. "Caesar may have crossed the Rubicon but he didn't cross the Beresina."

Suddenly the poet uttered a cry of joy and got up so brusquely that he upset some ink on his bear-skin coat. He had a brain-wave, putting us in mind of Chatterton.

From under his bedstead Rodolphe drew a considerable mass of papers amongst which were to be seen the manuscript of his famous drama *The Avenger*. This drama, which he had spent two years in writing, had been written and re-written so many times that the manuscript weighed over seven kilogrammes. Rodolphe laid aside the more recent pages and took the remainder to the chimney.

"I was sure I would find something," he said, "with a little patience. This is certainly a pretty log of prose. If I had foreseen this would happen I would have written a prologue and today I would have more to burn." But we cannot foresee everything!"

He lit some sheets and warmed his hands at the flame. In five minutes the first act of *The Avenger* had been enacted and Rodolphe had written three verses of the epitaph.

Nothing had astonished the four winds more than the sight of the fire in the chimney.

"It's an illusion!" whistled the north wind amusing itself by turning up the hair on Rodolphe's skin.

"If we whistle down the flue," suggested another wind, "the chimney will smoke."

But as they commenced to plague Rodolphe the south wind suddenly saw Mr. Arago at a window of the Observatory and the savant was pointing a menacing finger at the quartet of the winds.

"Let's save ourselves, quickly," said the south wind to its brothers. "The almanac says calm weather tonight. We'll find ourselves contradicting the Observatory and if we don't return by midnight Mr. Arago will check us."

During this time the second act of *The Avenger* burned successfully, and Rodolphe had written ten verses. But he was only able to write two during the third act.

"I always felt that act was too short," murmured Rodolphe. "But only when it is performed the fault is seen. Happily it lasts longer here. There are twenty three scenes of which the throne scene must bring me glory..."

The last passage of the throne scene burnt steadily and Rodolphe still had a six line stanza to write.

"We'll now pass on to the fourth act," he said. "It lasts for five minutes and consists only of a monologue."

The dénouement burnt slightly and then went out. Just at that instant Rodolphe embodied in a magnificent burst of lyricism the last words to the dead husband in whose honour he was working.

"This will do for a second performance," he said piling the remaining manuscripts under his bedstead.

The next day at 8 o'clock Angèle entered the hall holding in her hand a superb bouquet of violets in the centre of which bloomed two roses, also white. Throughout the night the young girl was paid compliments, by both men and women, on the lovely bouquet. This satisfied her *amour-propre* and she was very grateful to her cousin for it. She would perhaps have thought more of him if she had not been persecuted by a relation of the bride who had already danced several times with her. He was a blond young man with a fine pair of moustaches which curled up at the ends. The young man had already asked Angèle to give him the two white roses. But she had refused and when she forgetfully left them on a seat the young man immediately captured them.

The temperature in Rodolphe's turret was then forty degrees. Rodolphe leaned against the window and watched the lights in the hall where Angèle, who hated him, danced.

## CHAPTER X

### THE TEMPEST

THERE are certain days in the month, usually the 1st and the 15th, which from every point of view, are terrible. Rodolphe called these two days *The Tempests* and the approach of one of other of them filled him with fear. The former was the dawn which opened the door of the East, the latter of creditors, landlords, bailiffs and various other such people. The former opened with a shower of reminders, receipts and bills and terminated with a hailstorm of protests.

One 15th April morning Rodolphe was sleeping peacefully... dreaming that one of his uncles had left him in his will the whole province of Peru, including the Peruvians.

As he swam in this imaginary wealth the noise of a turning key in the lock interrupted the heir at the brightest moment in his golden dream.

Rodolphe sat up in his bed, his eyes and mind fogged with sleep, and looked around him.

The matutinal visitor wore a three-cornered hat, with a leather money bag on his back and carried a large portfolio. He was dressed in a grey linen coat and seemed to be breathless after his five-storey climb. He was friendly and his whole appearance was like that of a cashier about to commence his work.

At first Rodolphe was frightened. Seeing the three-cornered ed hat and the coat he thought it was a town sergeant.

But then he saw the leather money bag and was reassured.

"At last! I'm there!" he thought. "This must be part of

my heritage. He must come from the Islands...But why isn't he a negro?"

He motioned to the man and pointing to the money bag said:

"I know what it is. Put it down there, thank you."

The man was a clerk from the Bank of France. At Rodolphe's invitation he responded by shoving under his eyes a small piece of paper containing hieroglyphic signs and multi-coloured numbers.

"You want a receipt, of course," said Rodolphe, "that's only right. Pass me the pen and ink. There, on the table."

"You are mistaken, Sir," replied the collecting clerk, "I've come to collect 150 francs. Today is the 15th April."

"Really!" replied Rodolphe examining the bill, "My tailor's bill..." And looking alternatively at a coat on his bed and the bill he said: "Is it really the 15th of April? Extraordinary! I haven't eaten any strawberries as yet!"

"I give you four hours in which to pay," announced the clerk irritated by Rodolphe's irrelevancies. He left the room.

"There's no rest for honest people," said Rodolphe. "The instruguer! He's taking his money bag with him!"

Rodolphe closed the screens around his bed and returned to the road leading to his heritage. He missed the road but began a proud dream in which the Director of the Theatre-Francais visited him, hat in hand, to ask for a drama for his theatre. Rodolphe, who knew the ropes, first demanded his premiums. But when the Director was about to agree, the sleeper was awakened by the entrance of a second person, another 15th April creature.

It was Mr. Benoit, the steward of the hotel where Rodolphe ate. But at the time Mr. Benoit was landlord, bootmaker and money-lender to his tenants. On this particular morning he smelt of brandy and lapsed receipts. He carried an empty bag in his hand.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Rodolphe, "...This isn't the Director...he would have a white cravat...and a full bag!"

"Good morning, Mr. Rodolphe!" Mr. Benoit said approaching the bed.

"Mr. Benoit...good morning! What brings you here?"

"I've come to tell you today is the 15th of April."

"What already! Time does pass quickly! Most extraordinary! I must buy myself a Nankeen trouser. The 15th of April! I could never think of it without you, Mr. Benoit. I owe you much for reminding me!"

"You also owe me 162 francs," replied Benoit, "It's time the small amount was settled."

"I'm not absolutely hard pressed...I don't want to trouble you, Mr. Benoit. I'll give you time. Small amounts become large..."

"You've already put me off several times," replied the landlord.

"In that case it must be settled...it must be settled. It makes absolutely no difference to me...today or tomorrow...and then we are all mortal...it must be settled..."

A friendly smile lit up the wrinkles on the landlord's face and the bag filled with hope.

"What do I owe?" asked Rodolphe.

"Firstly three month's rent at 25 francs which amounts to 75 francs."

"Correct," said Rodolphe. "And then?"

"Three pairs of boots at 20 francs..."

"Just a minute, Mr. Benoit. We must not confuse things. My dealings with the landlord has nothing to do with the boot-maker...I want a separate account. Figures are serious matters and must not be confused."

"Very well," said Mr. Benoit mitigated by the hope that at least some account will be settled. "Here is a separate bill for the boots. Three pairs at 20 francs...sixty francs..."

Rodolphe glanced pitifully at a pair of misshapen boots. If they had been used by the wandering Jew they could not have been in a worse condition.

"But that's for running after Marie..." he said, "Yes, continue, Mr. Benoit..."

"I said sixty francs," replied Benoit. "Money lent 25 francs..."

"Stop. Each Saint, as you know, has his niche. You lent me that money as a friend. If you like we can leave the subject of boots and enter the subject of friendship which should have a separate account. By how much have you shown your friendship for me?"

"Twenty-five francs."

"Twenty-five francs! You have a cheap friend, Mr. Benoit! But as we said 75 francs, 60 francs and 27 francs...What does all that make?"

"One hundred and sixty-two francs," said Benoit, presenting the three bills..

"One hundred and six-two francs," said Rodolphe. "Extraordinary. What a beautiful thing addition is! Very well,

Mr. Benoit, we now know what we owe each other. You can give me the receipt next month and since, during that time your confidence in, and friendship for me, will be strengthened, I think you can allow me a further delay. If the landlord and bootmaker are persistent the friend should make them see reason. It's extraordinary, Mr. Benoit, but every time I think of you in your triple role of landlord, bootmaker and friend I am tempted to believe in the Holy Trinity."

While listening to Rodolphe the steward turned red, green, yellow and white and with each new jest he became more and more angry.

"Sir," he said, "I don't like people who jest. I have waited long enough. If by this evening the money isn't paid...I'll see what will have to be done."

Mr. Benoit's anger had risen to a tornado. And if the furniture did not also belong to him he would no doubt have broken a sofa-chair to bits.

He left, however, hurling menaces at Rodolphe.

"You've forgotten your bag!" Rodolphe shouted after him.

"What a job!" murmured the unfortunate young man when he was alone. "I would prefer to be a lion tamer!"

"I cannot remain here," he said jumping out of bed and dressing hastily. "I'll be invaded by his allies. I must flee and also have breakfast. I'll see Schaunard. I'll borrow some money off him. A hundred francs should do."

Descending the staircase Rodolphe met Mr. Benoit again. He had failed with his other tenants as his still empty bag attested.

"If anyone should want me tell them I've gone to the country...to the Alps..." said Rodolphe, "Or rather tell them I don't live here any longer."

"I'll tell them the truth," replied Benoit significantly emphasising his words.

Schaunard lived in Montmartre. To get there Rodolphe would have to traverse the whole of Paris. And it was a particularly dangerous journey for Rodolphe.

"The streets will be paved with creditors today," he murmured.

But he did not want to go through the boulevards. A fantastic hope, on the contrary, urged him to take the more dangerous way. On a day when millions were carried on the backs of collecting clerks, Rodolphe felt he may find a thousand franc note awaiting its Vincent de Paul. Rodolphe walked with discretion, his eyes glued to the ground, but he did not so much as find two pins..

In two hours he arrived at Schaunard's.

"Oh! It's you," said Schaunard.

"Yes, I've come for some breakfast."

"You've come at a bad time. I'm expecting my mistress whom I haven't seen for fifteen days. If you'd arrived ten minutes earlier..."

"Can you lend me a hundred francs?"

"Lord! You too!" replied Schaunard with astonishment, "You've come for money too! Have you joined my enemies?"

"It shall be returned on Monday..."

"To the Trinity. Have you forgotten what day this is?" I've got nothing. But there's still hope. The day isn't over. You may still meet Providence, who does not wake till midday."

"Providence is too concerned with small birds," said Rodolphe, "I'll see Marcel."

Marcel lived on Bréda Street. When Rodolphe found him he was sadly contemplating his great picture Crossing the Red Sea.

"What's the matter?" Rodolphe asked him, "You seem mortified."

"Alas!" said the painter talking allegorically "I've been in holy weak for the past fifteen days."

To Rodolphe this reply was as clear as crystal.

"Salted herrings and radish! I know!"

In fact Rodolphe still salted the memories of the time when he had been reduced to the exclusive consumption of the fish.

"This is serious," he said, "and I wanted to borrow a hundred francs from you."

"A hundred francs!" exclaimed Marcel. "That's fantastic! You've been drinking hashish!..."

"Alas!" said Rodolphe, "I've had nothing."

From midday to four o'clock that evening Rodolphe visited every body he knew. He walked through forty-eight quarters and covered eight miles. But he met with no success. The 15th of April had struck everyone with equal vigour. The dinner-hour was approaching. But to Rodolphe it seemed as distant as the raft of the Medusa.

As he was crossing the Neuf bridge an idea suddenly struck him.

"Oh! Oh!" said Rodolphe retracing his steps, "the 15th of April...I have an invitation to dinner today."

And delving into his pocket he pulled out the following invitation:

Villette Gateway  
 at Grand-Vainguer  
 For 300 people.  
 Anniversary Banquet  
 in honour of the birth  
 of the  
 Humanitarian Messiah  
 15th April 184...  
 Admission for one.  
 V.B.—Each person is entitled to only half a bottle of wine.

"I don't share the view of the Messiah's disciplines," he said to himself, "...but I'll share their food." And with the swiftness of a bird he covered the distance which separated him from the Gateway.

When he arrived at the Grand-Vainguer saloon he met an immense crowd. The saloon was meant for 300 but there were at least 500 people.

They commenced at last to serve the soup.

But as the people carried the first spoonful to their mouths, five or six persons in mufti and two town sergeants with a police superintendent at their head, entered the hall amidst much confusion.

"Gentlemen," the superintendent said, "by order of the authorities this banquet will not continue. I would ask you all to leave."

"Heavens!" said Rodolphe leaving with the others, "Fate deprives me even of my soup!"

At eleven o'clock he returned sadly home.

Mr. Benoit was waiting for him.

"I hope you have not forgotten what I said this morning," said Mr. Benoit, "Have you brought the money?"

"I shall get it tonight. You'll have it in the morning," said Rodolphe searching for his key and candle. Neither were to be found.

"Mr. Rodolphe," said Mr. Benoit, "I have rented your room out to another person. I must ask you to go elsewhere."

Rodolphe possessed a generous heart and the prospect of sleeping under the stars did not frighten him. He had often slept in the sentry-box in front of the Odoen. Only he wanted his things which consisted of a large bundle of papers.

"That's natural," said the landlord, "I have no right to keep them. I've left them on the writing table. Come with me. If the tenant is not in bed we can go in."

During the day the room had been rented out to a young girl named Mimi, with whom, in the past, Rodolphe had had some dealings.

He recognised her immediately. He whispered in her ear and squeezed her hand gently.

"It's raining!" he said indicating the window outside which a storm had just broken.

Mimi walked up to Mr. Benoit who waited in a corner of the room.

"He's the gentleman I've been waiting for all this evening" she said pointing towards Rodolphe.

"Very well!" said Benoit with a grimace.

While Mimi hurriedly prepared supper, midnight struck.

"The 15th of April has passed. I'm saved," said Rodolphe.

He went up to the young girl and taking her in his arms kissed her on the nape of her neck.

"Dear Mimi," he said "You couldn't turn me out. You have the bump of hospitality."

## CHAPTER XI

### A CAFE IN BOHEMIA

THE following chapter relates the circumstances under which Carolus Baremuiche, man of letters and Platonic philosopher, became a member of Bohemia at the age of twenty-four.

At this time Gustave Colline, the great philosopher, Marcel, the great painter, Schaunard, the great musician and Rodolphe, the great poet, as they were known to each other, regularly frequented the café Momus where they were called the Four Musketeers as they were always seen together. In fact they came and left together, sat together and sometimes did not pay their bill. But they were always a dignified assembly, like the Conservatoire Orchestra.

They usually chose to meet where there were about forty other customers taking their ease, but in the end found themselves alone because they soon made the place insupportable for the others.

The transient customer who ventured into their lair became, from the time of his entrance, the victim of the wild quartet, and more often than not was forced to leave his newspapers unread and his coffee undrunk because their unprecedented aphorisms on art, love and political economy had turned the cream. The conversation of the four companions was of such a nature that it had turned the waiter who served them into a lunatic in the very flower of his youth.

Things came to such a pass that the proprietor at last lost his patience and revealed his sufferings. These were :

1st. When Rodolphe came for his breakfast in the morning he carried away to his table all the newspapers in the establishment. He was so unreasonable as to even cut the bands and the result was the other customers, deprived of their organ of opinion lived, almost up to dinner time, as ignorant as carps on all political matters. The Bosquet band hardly knew the names of the members of the last cabinet.

Mr. Rodolphe had even forced the café to subscribe to *The Castor* of which he was the chief editor. The proprietor had, of course, at first refused. But then Rodolphe and his company shouted for the waiter every quarter of an hour : "*The Castor ! Bring us The Castor !*" These excited demands aroused the curiosity of some of the other customers and they also demanded *The Castor*. They, then subscribed to *The Castor*, a journal of the hat trade, which appeared every month embellished with a vignette and an article on the philosophy of variety by Gustave Colline.

2nd. The said Mr. Colline and his friend Mr. Rodolphe sought relaxation from mental labour by playing trictrac from ten in the morning to nearly midnight. As the establishment possessed only one set of trictrac this monopoly prevented others from indulging their passion for the game.

The Bosquet band consequently found themselves reduced to relating their first loves or playing piquet.

3rd. Mr. Marcel, forgetting that a café is a public place, brought his easel and box of paints and all the other appurtenances of his art. He even had models of various sexes which was a considerable inconvenience.

This affected the morals of the Bosquet band.

4th. Following the example of his friend, Mr. Schaunard talked of bringing his piano into the café but contented himself with singing in chorus a motif from his symphony '*The Influence of Blue on the Arts*'. He went further and slipped into the lantern, which held the café's sign, the following notice :

Free course in music, vocal and instrumental  
for both sex.

Enquire at the counter.

This encumbered the counter with all sorts of persons seeking

information.

Besides Mr. Schaunard made the café a rendezvous where he met a lady name Phémie Teinturière who never wore a cap.

Mr. Bósquet declared that he would not set foot in an establishment where nature was thus outraged.

At the best of times the company ate moderately but there came a time when they moderated it still further. Under the pretext that they had discovered their mocha adulterated with chicory they imported their own filter and made their own coffee sweetened with sugar bought outside at a low price.

5th. Corrupted by the discourses of these gentlemen, the waiter, Bergami (thus named because of his side whiskers) wrote a poem to the proprietor's wife at the counter which so affected the lady that she forgot her duty to her mother and her husband.

From the disorderly style it was easy to recognise that the letter was written under the pernicious influence of Mr. Rodolphe and his literature.

In consequence, and with much regret, the proprietor of the establishment felt it very necessary to beg the Colline company to find another place for their revolutionary conferences.

Gustave Colline, the Cicero of the band, proved *a priori*, to the proprietor that his complaints were ridiculous and ill-founded, that it was an honour to him for their having chosen his establishment as a centre of discussion, that if he and his friends left the café would be ruined since it was their presence which elevated it to the height of a centre of art and literature.

"But you order so little," complained the proprietor.

"That is only an argument in favour of the sobriety of our morals," replied Rodolphe.

"We could spend more, if you opened an account for us."

"And we'll keep the account" added Marcel.

The proprietor pretended not to have heard. He demanded an explanation for the letter Bergami had written to his wife. Accused of having helped in this illicit correspondence Rodolphe vivaciously proved his innocence.

"Besides," he added, "Madame's virtue is a sure barrier against..."

"Oh! yes!" the proprietor said with a proud smile, "my wife was educated at Saint-Denis."

Briety, with the aid of the beautiful eloquence of Colline, all differences were settled and an amicable arrangement arrived at. The four friends promised not to make their coffee, to issue a free copy of *The Castor* to the establishment, to give up, to the Bosquet band, the trictrac set from midday to two o'clock

every Sunday and above all not ask for any more credit.

Everything went smoothly for several days.

On Christmas eve the four friends arrived at the café with their wives.

There were Miss Musette, Miss Mimi, Rodolphe's new mistress, an adorable creature whose loud voice resembled the clash of cymbals, and Phémie Teinturière, Schaunard's idol. Phémie wore a cap. As for Colline's wife, whom we have never met, she was always to be found at home putting in the commas in her husband's manuscripts. After coffee, which was accompanied by an extraordinary battalion of small glasses, they ordered punch. Not accustomed to such grand ways the waiter repeated the order twice. Phémie was in an ecstasy of joy and drank deeply from large glasses. Marcel argued with Musette about a new hat whose origin he suspected. Mimi and Rodolphe, still in the honeymoon stage, were dumbly eloquent alternated with deep sighs. Colline amused himself by talking to each lady in turn and quoted the most gallant sayings from the Almanac of the Muses.

While the company thus laughed and enjoyed themselves, a strange person, seated alone at an isolated table, watched the animated scene with a strange look in his eyes.

For the last fifteen days he had sat thus every evening. Of all the customers he was the only one able to endure the frightful noise created by the Bohemians. The wildest opinions left him unmoved. He remained the whole evening, smoking his pipe with a mathematical regularity, his eyes fixed as if he were guarding some treasure, his ears attentive to all that was said around him. He appeared to be in easy circumstances as he possessed a watch attached to a gold chain and one day Marcel was surprised to see him change a louis at the counter. From that moment he was known as the capitalist among the four friends.

Suddenly Schaunard, who had excellent sight, remarked that the glasses were empty.

"Good heavens!" said Rodolphe, "This is Christmas eve and since we are all good Christians we must have an extra..."

"Yes," said Marcel, "we must have some more."

"Colline," said Rodolphe, "ring for the waiter."

Colline rang the bell furiously.

"What shall we have?" Marcel asked.

Colline bending his body into an arc before the ladies said:

"The ladies must decide first."

"I want some champagne," said Musette clicking her tongue.

"Have you gone mad?" said Marcel. "In the first place champagne is not wine."

"So much the better. I like the noise it makes."

"I'd like some beaune in a small basket," said Mimi fondling Rodolphe with her eyes.

"Have you lost your head?" Rodolphe asked.

"No, but I want to," Mimi replied on whom beaune exercised a particular effect. Her lover was defeated by her answer.

"I want some parfait amour. It's good for the stomach," said Phémie bouncing on the elastic divan.

Schaunard, in his nasal voice, muttered some words which made Phémie wince.

"Let's run up a bill for a thousand francs, just for once!" said Marcel.

"They won't in future complain that we order very little," said Rodolphe.

"Yes," agreed Colline, "let's have a splendid feast. We owe the ladies a passive obedience, love makes us devoted, wine is the substance of pleasure, pleasure is the duty of youth, and ladies are flowers which must be watered. Water then! Waiter! Waiter!"

And Colline feverishly rang the bell.

The waiter arrived as rapidly as the north wind.

When he heard champagne, beaune and various other liquors mentioned his face revealed every shade of surprise.

"I'm hungry," said Mimi, "I'll have some ham."

"I'll have sardines and butter," said Phémie.

"Anything more?" asked Marcel.

"No, that's enough," replied the ladies.

"Waiter, serve us quickly," said Colline gravely.

The waiter had turned many colours with shock. He slowly walked up to the counter and told the proprietor of the extraordinary things that had been ordered.

The proprietor at first thought it was joke but the bell rang again and he himself went up and spoke to Colline, whom he held in high esteem. Colline explained that they wanted to celebrate Christmas and that everything they had ordered should be served well prepared.

The proprietor made no reply. He retired, tying knots in his serviette, to hold a fifteen minute consultation with his wife. She, thanks to the liberal education she had received at Saint-Denis, where the fine arts and belles-letters were particularly admired, persuaded her husband to have the supper served.

"They may have the money for once," agreed the proprietor and told the waiter to serve all that had been ordered. He then sat down to a game of piquet with an old customer. What fatal imprudence!

Right up to midnight the waiter was occupied in climbing

up and down the stairs and each time he was ordered to bring something more. Musette ate in the English fashion and had the tablecloth changed after every mouthful. Mimi drank all the wine from all the glasses. Schaunard suffered from a perpetual Sahara-like dryness in his throat. Colline executed cross-fires with his eyes, bit the serviette and pinched the table leg mistaking it for Phémie's knee. As for Marcel and Rodolphe they remained self-possessed and awaited, not without a little uneasiness, the end of the supper.

At a quarter to twelve proprietor's wife brought the bill, which had attained the exaggerated figure of 25 francs 75 centimes.

"We'll throw lots," said Marcel, "as to who will speak to the proprietor?"

They took a domino set and extracted the largest die.

It fell to Schaunard to be the plenipotentiary. Now Schaunard was an excellent virtuoso but a poor diplomat. He reached the counter just when the proprietor lost to the old customer. Having suffered three successive defeats he was in a bad humour and when Schaunard made his first overtures he was thrown into a violent anger. Schaunard was a good musician, but had deplorable manners. He became insolent to the proprietor. The quarrel grew worse and the proprietor shouted that they could not leave until the bill was paid. Colline tried to intervene with his beautiful eloquence. But when the proprietor saw the serviette Colline had chewed to rags, his anger increased and he dared to lay a profane hand on the overcoat of the philosopher and on the pelisses of the ladies.

The Bohemians and the proprietor hurled insults at each other.

The ladies discussed love and clothes.

The stranger suddenly awoke from his impassivity. Slowly he rose from his seat, took one step, then two, and walked like any natural person. He went up to the proprietor and drawing him aside whispered something in his ear. Rodolphe and Marcel stared at him. The proprietor at last retired saying:

"Certainly, I agree, Mr. Barbemuche, certainly. Arrange it with them."

Mr. Barbemuche returned to his table for his hat, put it on his head, tilted it to the right and in three strides reached Marcel and Rodolphe. He removed his hat inclined towards the gentlemen, bowed to the ladies, drew out his handkerchief, wiped his face and said in a timid voice:

"Excuse me gentlemen for the indiscretion I have committed," he said, "But for a long time I have burned with a desire to make your acquaintance. Unfortunately I could never find a

favourable occasion to enter into conversation. May I seize this occasion?"

"Certainly, certainly," said Colline.

Marcel and Rôdolphe bowed without saying a word.

But Schaunard could not hide his exquisite lack of manners.

"Allow me, Sir," he said, "but you cannot have the honour of our acquaintance and the time is inopportune... Could you give me some tobacco?... My friends will decide the rest..."

"Gentlemen," replied Barbemuche, "like you I am a disciple of the fine-arts. From what I could gather from your conversation our tastes are very similar. I am desirous of being your friend and to meet you here every evening... The proprietor is a vulgar fool but I have spoken to him and you may leave... I do hope you will not refuse my offer of friendship and..."

Schaunard's face reddened with indignation.

"He is slighting us," he said, "We cannot accept. He has paid our bill. I shall play him in billiards for 25 francs and allow him some points."

Barbemuche accepted the proposal and was good humoured enough to lose. This fine trait gained for him the esteem of the Bohemians.

They separated promising to meet the next evening.

"Well," said Schaunard, "our dignity is saved. We owe him nothing."

"And we can have another supper," added Colline.

## CHAPTER XII

### A BOHEMIAN RECEPTION

WHEN he had settled the bill, which the Bohemians had raised, Carolus found that he had Colline to accompany him home. Ever since he had set eyes on the four friends he had taken particular note of Colline. This Socrates attracted him although he later came to discover that he was a Platonic philosopher. That was one reason why he had chosen him to introduce him into the literary society. On the road Barbemuche asked Colline if he would like to drink something in a café which was still open. Not only did Colline refuse but doubled his pace when he passed the café and drew his large felt hat over his eyes.

"Why won't you enter that café?" asked Barbemuche with polite insistence.

"There are many reasons," replied Colline. "The woman at the counter makes a very deep study of the exact sciences and I want to avoid having a long discussion with her. That's

why I avoid passing this way at any time during the day: I live in this quarter with Marcel."

"I want to offer you a glass of punch and talk to you. Don't you know any other place where you won't be troubled by some...mathematical difficulty?" said Barbemuche wisely.

Colline thought for a while.

"Here's a wine merchant's" said Colline pointing out a shop.

Barbemuche made a grimace and hesitated.

"Is it a respectable place?" He asked.

Seeing his glacial and reserved attitude, his secret smile and above all his watch and chain Colline felt that Barbemuche must be employed in some embassy and feared being compromised into entering a tavern.

"There is no danger," replied Colline, "At this hour the diplomatic corps must be asleep."

Barbemuche decided to enter but at the bottom of his soul he wished he had a false nose. For greater safety he asked for a cubicle and took care to attach a serviette on the curtains of the door. Having completed these precautions he seemed less uneasy and ordered a bowl of punch. Excited by the warm influence, revealed some details about himself, dared to hope that he could become an official member of the society of Bohemians and Solicited Colline's help in the early realisation of this ambition.

Colline replied that so far as he was concerned there were no obstacles.

"You can rely on my support," he said, "but I cannot promise that of my friends."

"But why should they want to refuse me?" asked Barbemuche.

Colline put down his glass and, assumed a serious air.

"You cultivate the fine arts?" he asked.

"I labour modestly in the noble fields of the intellect," replied Barbemuche revealing the fine colours of his prose style.

Colline found the sentence attractive.

"You know music?" he asked.

"I play the double-bass."

"It's a philosophic instrument, its notes are grave. If you know music then you must realise that, without breaking the law of harmony, a fifth member cannot be introduced into a quartet. It will cease to be a quartet."

"It becomes a quintet," replied Carolus.

"Pardon?"

"A quintet."

"Certainly. But if to the Trinity, that divine triangle, you

add another person it will no longer be a triangle but a square. The whole principle of religion is broken!"

"Excuse me," said Carolus his mind groping in the confused brambles of Colline's reasoning, "But I don't see..."

"Follow me closely..." continued Colline, "Do you know astronomy?"

"A little. I'm a Bachelor"

"There is a song...Bachelor of Tisette...I forget the tune... You must know then that there are four cardinal points. If we add a fifth cardinal point the whole harmony of nature will be upset. That is what is called a cataclysm. Do you understand?"

"I'm waiting for the conclusion..."

"Well, the conclusion is the end of a discourse even as death is the end of life and marriage the end of love. I and my friends have only this one fear. The harmony which exists between us in morals, opinions, taste and character will be broken by the introduction of another member. We hope one day to be the four cardinal points of contemporary art. I won't hide it from you—and we hesitate to add a fifth."

"It is better, however, to have five," hazarded Carolus.

"But it is no longer four."

"It's a futile pretence..."

"There is nothing futile in this world—small streams make great rivers, small syllables build up the Alexandrine and the mountains are composed of small grains of sand. You'll find it in the Wisdom of Nations."

"You think your comrades will make it difficult for me to enjoy the honour of their intimate company?"

"I'm afraid so," said Colline. "Tell me, my dear sir, which furrow do you particularly follow in the noble fields of the intellect?"

"The great philosophers and the classical authors are my models. I nourish myself studying them. Telemachus first inspired in me the passion which devours me..."

"Telemachus? You find a lot of him on the quay at any time. On one occasion I bought him for ten sous. Nevertheless for the time being, he is good enough."

"Yes, sir," continued Carolus, "high philosophy and sound literature is what I aspire to. To me art is a priesthood."

"Yes, yes, yes..." said Colline, "There is another song."

And he began to sing:

"Yes, art is a priesthood,  
Let us learn to serve it."

"I believe that's from Robert the Devil," he added.

"As I was saying, art being a solemn thing, writers must necessarily..."

"I beg your pardon?" interrupted Colline who just then heard one o'clock strike. "It's morning and I don't want to keep a person who is very dear to me waiting. Besides I promised I'd..."

"It is late," agreed Carolus, "let's go."

"You live far?" asked Colline.

"Roval-Saint-Honore Street, No. 10..."

Colline had formerly had occasion to enter the building and remembered it was a magnificent mansion.

"I'll speak to my friends about you," he told Carolus on parting, "I'll try and use whatever influence I have with them... But just one word of advice."

"Yes?"

"Be friendly and gallant to Mimi, Musette and Phémie. These ladies exercise great authority over my friends. With a little pressure through them you can obtain whatever you want from Marcel, Rodolphe or Schaunard."

"I shall try," said Carolus.

Colline met the Bohemians the next day. The three friends were at breakfast indulging in an orgy of artichokes and pepper-sauce.

"I have come," said Colline, "as the ambassador of the generous gentleman we met yesterday evening."

"Does he want his money returned?" asked Marcel.

"Oh! No!" exclaimed Mimi. "I can't believe that of him. He was such a charming man!"

"No, that doesn't worry him," replied Colline. "The young man wishes to meet us, to join our society and share in its benefits."

The three Bohemians lifted up their heads and stared at each other.

"There it is," said Colline. "And the discussion is now thrown open."

"Yesterday evening," said Colline, "when I left you, you asked me to follow him. But he invited me to accompany him. For half the night he pressed me with attentions and fine liquors. Nevertheless I retained my independence."

"Very good," said Schaunard.

"What are the principal traits of his character?" asked Marcel.

"Greatness of soul, austere morals, a victim of candour, a fear for entering wine shops, Bachelor of Letters, plays the double-bass, and a nature which sometimes changes ten francs."

Very good," said Schaunard.

"What are his hopes?"

"I have already told you. His ambition knows no limits—he aspires to join us."

"In other words he wants to exploit us," said Marcel. "He wants to be seen mounted on our stage-coach."

"What is his art?" asked Rodolphe.

"Yes," continued Marcel, "What does he practise?"

"His art? What does he practise? A mixture of literature and philosophy."

"What is his philosophy?"

"He practises a departmental philosophy. He calls art a priesthood."

"A priesthood!" exclaimed Rodolphe with fear.

"That's what he said."

"What is his line in literature?"

"Telemachus."

"Very good," said Schaunard biting the heart of an artichoke.

"Very good? Are you mad?" said Marcel. "I won't advise you to repeat that outside."

Schaunard, ignoring his friend, gave Phémie, whom he caught invading the sauce, a kick under the table.

"One more," said Rodolphe. "What is his position in life? How does he live? His name and house?"

"His position is honourable, he is a professor of all sorts in a rich household. His name is Carolus Barbemuche, he lives well and stays on Royal Street, in a mansion."

"A furnished mansion?"

"It has some furniture."

"Just a word," said Marcel. "It's evident that Colline has been bribed. He has sold his vote for a sum, though in small glasses. Don't interrupt," said Marcel, seeing the philosopher about to protest. "You can speak soon. Colline, venial soul, has presented this stranger to you in a most favourable aspect. As I have already said I can see the stranger's object. He wants to exploit us. He realises we are on the right road and wants to join us so that he may arrive with us at the wharf of fame."

"Very good," said Schaunard. "Is there any more sauce?"

"No," said Rodolphe, "the edition is exhausted."

"Yet again," continued Marcel, "perhaps this insidious patron of Colline aspires to the honour of our intimacy only with criminal intentions. We are not alone gentlemen," the orator said glancing eloquently at the ladies, "and Colline's protégé, in trying to enter our Society under the cloak of literature, may be a seducer. Think! As for me I vote against him."

"I want to make a small correction," said Rodolphe. "In his remarkable speech Marcel has told us that the aforementioned Carolus wants to join our Society, with the object of dishonouring us, under the cloak of literature."

"That was a figure of speech," said Marcel.

"It's a poor figure of speech. Literature has no cloak."

"Since I act as an ambassador," said Colline, "I must naturally support my own conclusions. Marcel, being devoured with jealousy, is misled. The great artist is so insensed..."

"I protest!" shouted Marcel.

"...so insensed that he has introduced into his discourse a figure that has already been pointed out as incorrect."

"Colline is an idiot!" Marcel cried delivering a heavy thump on the table and creating a profound agitation among the plates. "He is not competent to speak on the question. He has an old book instead of a heart!" (Prolonged laughter from Schaunard).

During the tumult Colline gravely contemplated the folds on his white cravat. When silence was re-established he continued his discourse.

"Gentlemen, with a single word I am going to dispense from your minds the chimerical fears and suspicions that Marcel has been able to create concerning Carolus."

"Go ahead," said Marcel.

"Just one word," said Colline blowing out the match with which he had lit his pipe.

"Speak! Speak!" together shouted Rodolphe, Schaunard and the ladies to whom the debate was of absorbing interest.

"Gentlemen," said Colline, "although I have been personally and violently attacked here, although I have been accused of having sold my influence with you for wine, I will make no reply to these attacks on my probity, my loyalty and my morality. But I want you to respect me" (the orator thumped his stomach twice.) "My discretion is well known and is now called in doubt. I have been accused of wanting to introduce a person with designs hostile to your...sentiments. This supposition is an insult to the virtue of the ladies, and more, an insult to their good taste. Carolus Barbemuche is ugly." (Visible denial on Phémie's face. Noises under the table. It is Schaunard correcting with a kick the compromising frankness of his young friend).

"But," said Colline, "what is going to reduce to powder the miserable argument my adversary raised against Carolus, and the fears that he has exploited, is that Carolus is a platonic philosopher" (Sensation among the men, tumult among the ladies).

"Platonic? What is that?" asked Phémie.

"It is the malady of men who are not to embrace a woman," said Mimi. "I had such a lover once for two hours."

"How silly!" said Musette.

"You are right, my dear," said Marcel, "The Platonist in love is like wine in water. Give us pure wine!"

"And let youth live!" added Musette.

Colline's declaration had created a favourable reaction towards Carolus. He thought the time opportune to profit by his adroit and eloquent inculpation.

"Now," he continued, "I don't see what can justly be brought against the young man, who, after all, has done us a good turn. As for me, who has been accused of thoughtlessly wanting to introduce him amongst us, I consider that opinion hostile to my dignity. I have acted in this affair with the discretion of a serpent, and if such discretion is not allowed me, I offer my resignation."

"Do you want to put that before the house?" asked Marcel.

"I do," replied Colline.

The three Bohemians consulted each other and by common consent voted for the restoration to the philosopher of the discretion which he claimed. Marcel spoke saying that he agreed with the philosopher and withdrew a little of what he had previously said... But with regard to having to pass a definite vote permitting Carolus into the Society Marcel voiced the following amendment:

"As the introduction of a new member, who may be an element of discord, ignorant as he is of the morals, characters and opinions of his comrades, is a serious affair, each member shall spend a day with Carolus and report on his life, his tastes, his literary capacity and his wardrobe. The Bohemians will communicate their particular impressions and only then will it be decided whether to admit or refuse him. Besides before his actual admission Carolus will serve a month's novitiate, that is to say, during this period he will have no right to their intimacy and to their handshake in the street. On the final day the new member will give a splendid feast the budget for which should not be less than twelve francs."

This amendment was carried by a majority of three to one, that of Colline, who felt that it was an insult to him and a new attack in his discretion.

That same evening Colline went to the cafe early to be the first to meet Carolus.

He did not have to wait long. Carolus soon arrived carrying three large bouquets of roses.

"Well!" said Colline with astonishment, "What are you doing with that garden?"

"I remembered what you told me yesterday, that your friends can be won over through the ladies.. It's for them. They're beautiful aren't they?"

"They must have cost at least 15 sous."

"You think so?" replied Carolus. "In December 15 francs is nearer the mark."

"Heavens!" cried Colline, "Three crowns for that simple gift of flowers. What folly! Are you related to the Cordilleres? Well, I'm afraid they'll have to be thrown out of the window."

"But why? What do you mean?"

Colline then related the jealous suspicions Marcel had aroused in the minds of his friends and of the violent discussion that had taken place concerning his admission to the literary society.

"I protested that your intentions were honourable," concluded Colline, "but there was still quite a lot of opposition. I would ask you to be careful not to arouse their jealous suspicion by being too gallant with the ladies. The roses must be thrown away."

And he took the bouquets and hid them in a cupboard

"But that isn't all," he continued, "Each of these gentlemen want to stay separately with you to enquire into your character, tastes, etc."

And then, so that Barbemuche may not run foul of his friends, he gave him a brief portrait sketch of each of the Bohemians.

Carolus consented.

The three friends soon arrived with their wives.

Rodolphe was polite to Carolus, Schaunard familiar but Marcel held aloof. Carolus forced himself to be gay and warm-hearted with the men and very indifferent towards the ladies.

Before they parted that evening Barbemuche invited Rodolphe to dine with him the next day. Only he begged of him to arrive at midday.

The poet accepted.

"Good," he said to himself, "so I start the inquiry."

The following day at the appointed hour, Rodolphe went to see Carolus. Barbemuche lived in a really beautiful mansion on Royale Street and had a most comfortable room to himself. But what surprised Rodolphe was to see the shutters closed, the curtains drawn and two candles burning on a table even though it was still daylight. He asked for an explanation.

"Study is the daughter of mystery and silence," replied Carolus.

They sat down and spoke. After about an hour's conversa-

tion Carolus dropped a hint that he would like Rodolphe to hear a small book he had written.

Rodolphe knew he was caught. But he was curious to learn the colour of Barbemuche's style and assented assuring him that he would be delighted to...

Carolus did not wait for the completion of the sentence. He locked the door and returning to Rodolphe immediately produced a small thin book which drew a smile of satisfaction from the poet.

"Is that the manuscript of your work?" he asked.

"No," replied Carolus, "it's the catalogue to my manuscripts. I am searching for the number of the book you have permitted me to read to you...Here. *Don Lopez* or Fate No. 14. It's on the third shelf."

And he opened a small cupboard which to Rodolphe's surprise, contained a vast quantity of manuscripts. Carolus, removing a manuscript, closed the cupboard and sat before the poet.

Rodolphe glanced at one of the four books which composed the work written on large sheets of paper.

"It is not in verse," said Carolus, "but it is called *Don Lopez*."

He took the first book and commenced to read :

"One cold winter night, two horsemen, enveloped in their cloaks and mounted on lazy mules rode side by side along one of the routes which crosses the horrible solitude of the deserts of Sierra Morena.."

"Where am I?" thought Rodolphe overwhelmed by this opening. Carolus continued to read the first chapter which was all written in the same vein.

Rodolphe listened vaguely and dreamed of finding a way of escape.

"There's the window," he said to himself, "but they're all closed and we are on the fourth floor. Ah! Now I understand these precautions."

"What do you think of my first chapter?" Carolus demanded. "Please, I beg of you, give your unbiased opinion."

Rodolphe remembered having heard some fragments of declamatory philosophy uttered by Don Lopez, the hero, on suicide and hazarded the following reply :

"The great character of Don Lopez has been studied with care. The description of Don Alvar's mule pleases me immensely. The landscape descriptions are beautiful. As for the ideas they remind me of J. J. Rousseau's sown in the mind of Tesage. But just one criticism. You use too many commas and abuse the word 'henceforth.' It is a pretty word which can be used from time to time to lend colour to the style but its use

must not be abused."

Carolus took up the second volume and read the title again, *Don Lopez or Fate*.

"I knew a Don Lopez once," said Rodolphe, "He sold cigarettes and chocolates in Bayonne. Perhaps he is a relation of your...Continue..."

At the end of the second chapter the poet interrupted Carolus.

"Isn't your throat sore?" he asked.

"Not at all," replied Carolus. "I want you to hear the story of Inesille."

"I'm most curious...but if you're tired...don't worry..."

"Chapter 3!" announced Carolus in a clean voice.

Rodolphe attentively examined Carolus and noticed that he had short neck and a ruddy complexion.

"I still have a chance," the poet thought after having made this discovery. "It's apoplexy."

"We shall pass to chapter 4. I want you to tell me what you think of the love scenc?"

And he returned to his reading.

For a moment Carolus looked up at Rodolphe to see the reaction on his face. Carolus saw the poet reclining on a chair holding his head in the attitude of a man whose thoughts were far away.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Ssh!" said Rodolphe. "Can't you hear? I thought I heard someone shout fire! Shall we find out?"

Carolus listened for an instant but heard nothing.

"Sorry" said the poet. "Continue. Don Alvar interests me enormously. He's a noble young man."

Carolus read:

"O Inesille, whatever you may be, angel or devil, whatever your country may be, my life belongs to you, and I will follow you through heaven and hell."

At this moment there was a knock at the door and Carolus was called outside.

"It's the janitor," he said opening the door.

It was the janitor. He brought a letter. Carolus opened it hastily.

"What a nuisance!" he said, "We must postpone our reading. I have received news which forces me to leave immediately.

"A letter from heaven!" thought Rodolphe. "I can recognise the seal of Providence."

"If you like," Carolus said, "you can accompany me and when I've finished we can have dinner."

"I'm at your command," said Rodolphe.

That evening when he returned to the literary society the poet was questioned by his friends concerning Barbemuche.

"Are you satisfied with him? Has he any good traits?" demanded Marcel and Schaunard.

"I have paid dearly for it," said Rodolphe.

"Did he make you pay?" demanded Schaunard with indignation.

"He read me a novel about Don Lopez and on Alvar who call their mistresses Devils or Angels."

"How horrible!" exclaimed all the Bohemians in a chorus.

"But otherwise," said Colline, "Literature apart, what is your opinion of Carolus?"

"He's a fine young man. But you can make your own personal observations. Carolus wants to entertain us one after the other. Schaunard is invited to dinner tomorrow. When you're with Barbemuche avoid the cupboard—it's dangerous."

Schaunard was punctual and undertook his inquiry in the spirit of a bailiff making an attachment. He returned that evening his mind full of notes. He had studied Barbemuche from the point of view of property.

"Well," they asked him. "What's your opinion?"

"Barbemuche," he replied, "is full of good qualities. He knows the names of all the wines and gave me beautiful things to eat that I have not had at my aunt's on a feast day. He has intimate connections with the tailors of Vivienne Street and the shoemakers of Panoramas. I also noticed he was about our size and we could borrow his clothes when necessary. His morals are less severe than Colline would have us believe. He came everywhere I took him and he gave me breakfast in two acts, the second in a tavern where I'm well known. Carolus was quite natural. Marcel is invited tomorrow."

Carolus knew that among the Bohemians Marcel was the greatest obstacle in his way. He therefore treated him with particular care. But what pleased the artist most was the promise Carolus gave him of trying to get his pupil's family to sit for their portraits.

When it was Marcel's turn to report they no longer found in him the same hostile attitude towards Carolus.

The fourth day Colline informed Carolus that he was admitted.

"What! I've been admitted!" he cried crushed with joy.

"Yes," replied Colline, "but subject to a few corrections."

"What do you mean?"

"You still have a heap of small vulgar habits that must be corrected."

"I'll do my best," said Carolus.

During the period of his novitiate the Platonic philosopher assiduously cultivated the friendship of the Bohemians and when he made a closer study of their morals he was often quite astonished.

One morning Colline, his face radiant, went to see Barbemuche.

"Well," he said, "you are definitely admitted. It is all over. It only remains to fix the day and the place for the reception. That's what I've come to find out."

"Why it's perfect," replied Carolus. "The parents of my pupil are at present in the country. The young vicount, whose teacher I am, will lend the apartments for the evening. It will be fine. Only we'll have to invite him."

"That's difficult," said Colline, "we can open literary horizons for him but will he consent?"

"I'm quite sure he will."

"Then it only remains to fix the day."

"We'll arrange that this evening at the café," said Barbemuche.

Carolus found his pupil and told him that he had just been admitted into a great literary society and to celebrate his admission he was giving a dinner followed by a small reception. He invited him to join them.

"As the reception will continue till late at night I think it will be advisable to hold it in these apartments here. Francois, your servant, is discreet, your parents need know nothing, and you'll come to know the great artists and authors."

"Published?" asked the young man.

"Certainly. One is the editor in chief of the *L'Echarpe d'Iris* which your mother receives. They are very distinguished people. I am their intimate friend. Their women are charming."

"Will there be ladies?" asked Vicount Paul.

"Ravishing women," replied Carolus.

"Oh thank you! Certainly, we can hold the feast here. I'll light all the chandeliers and take the covers off the furniture."

That evening at the café Barbemuche announced that the reception would take place the following Saturday.

The Bohemians told their mistresses to pay particular attention to their toilet.

"Don't forget," they told them, "we are entering a real saloon. Your toilet must be simple but rich."

On that day the whole street was informed that Mimi, Phémie and Musette were going into society.

The morning of the reception Colline, Marcel and Schaunard went in a body to see Barbemuche, who was surprised to see

them so early.

"Has anything happened?" he asked uneasily.

"Yes and no," replied Colline. "Among ourselves we don't stand on ceremony but among strangers we keep a certain decorum."

"Well," continued Colline, "as we have this evening to meet the young gentleman who opens his saloons to us, out of respect for him and ourselves, we have simply come to ask you to lend us some good clothes. It is impossible as you will understand, for us to enter this sumptuous place in jerseys and coats."

"But," said Carolus, "I haven't got four coats."

"We'll arrange that ourselves," said Colline.

"Here you are then," said Carolus opening a well stocked cupboard.

"But you have an arsenal of clothes!"

"Three hats!" cried Schaunard in ecstasy. "Why three hats when you have only one head?"

"And shoes!" said Rodolphe, "Look at them!"

In the twinkling of an eye each had chosen a complete outfit.

"The ladies will be resplendent this evening," they said.

"But," said Barbemuche, glancing at his empty wardrobe, "you've left me nothing. How can I receive them."

"Ah! You! That's different!" said Rodolphe. "You are the master of the house. You can brush etiquette aside."

"But," protested Carolus, "there's only a dressing gown, a trouser, a flannel vest and slippers left. You've taken everything!"

"It won't Matter. We excuse you," replied the Bohemians.

At six o'clock a beautiful dinner was served in the dining room. The Bohemians arrived. Marcel limped and was in a bad mood. The young Vicount Paul descended on the ladies and escorted them to the best places. Mimi was fantastically dressed. Musette provocative and Phémie resembled a window decorated with coloured glasses. The dinner lasted two and a half hours and was very gay.

The young Vicount, who was Mimi's neighbour, stamped her feet, and Phémie called for a second helping of each course. Schaunard drank heavily. Rodolphe composed sonnets marking the rhythm breaking glasses. Colline chatted to Marcel who was sulky.

"What's the matter?" asked Colline.

"My feet. Carolus must have a mistress' foot."

"But" said Colline, "you must tell him you cannot be made to suffer like this. In future he must buy a larger size. I'll arrange that. But let's go into the saloon now."

The reception opened with a flourish.

Schaunard sat at the piano and played his new symphony, *The Death of the Young Girl*. The beautiful part on the March of the Creditor received three encores. Two chords were broken.

Marcel was still morose and Carolus came up and spoke to him.

"My dear sir," said Marcel, "we can never be good friends. Physical dissimilarities are always an indication of moral dissimilarities. Philosophy and medicine prove it."

"Well?"

"Well, since your shoes are too small for me it proves that our characters are different. But your reception is charming."

It was one in the morning before the Bohemians retired making long detours home. Barbemuche was ill and started to give his pupil a drunken discourse. His pupil, on the other hand, dreamt of Mimi's blue eyes.

### CHAPTER XIII

#### A HOUSE WARMING

THE following incidents occurred some time after Rodolphe had been keeping house with young Miss Mimi. For about eight days the Bohemian society could not explain the sudden disappearance of Rodolphe and nobody could trace his whereabouts. They searched for him in every place he was accustomed to visit but everywhere received the same reply. "We haven't seen him for eight days."

Gustave Colline in particular was very perturbed. Some days ago he had entrusted Rodolphe with an article on high philosophy to be inserted in *The Castor*. Had the article appeared before the astonished eyes of Europe? That was the question the unhappy Colline asked himself. And his anxiety was quite natural. So far philosophy had not been so prominently published in any paper and he burned with desire to know what reaction his article, written after Cicero, had produced. Already, to satisfy his *amour-propre*, he had spent six francs visiting all the saloons in Paris. But nowhere did he see *The Castor*. Not being able to endure this anxiety any longer he vowed that he would not rest, even for a minute, until he had laid his hands on the elusive editor.

Aided by slow chance the philosopher was at last able to trace him. In two days he had discovered where Rodolphe lived and presented himself at his door at six o'clock in the morning.

Rodolphe lived in a mansion on a deserted street in Fanebourg-Saint-Germain. When Colline arrived at the door he found

no key in the lock. He knocked for ten minutes but there was no reply. The noise brought the janitor out, who requested Colline to be silent.

"The gentleman is asleep", he said.

"That's why I want to wake him," replied Colline knocking again.

"He does not wish to answer," said the janitor depositing a newly polished pair of boots and ladies' shoes near the door.

"Well, well!" said Colline examining them. "Polished shoes! I think I've made a mistake."

"What do you want?" asked the janitor.

"And ladies' shoes!" Colline continued speaking to himself, thinking of the austere life of his friend. "Yes, I've certainly made a mistake. This couldn't be Rodolphe's room."

"Excuse me, sir, but it is."

"Aren't you mistaken, my dear man?"

"Pardon?"

"Certainly, you're wrong", said Colline. "What's that?" he said pointing to the boots.

"Mr. Rodolphe's boots. Why?"

"And those, also Mr. Rodolphe's?"

"His wife's shoes," said the janitor.

"His wife!" exclaimed Colline stupefied. "The voluptuary! That's why he won't answer!"

"If you give me your name, sir, I could tell Mr. Rodolphe..."

"No," replied Colline, "Now that I've found him it's all right."

And he went immediately to announce the great news to his friends. The news of Rodolphe's polished shoes they treated as a mere figment of Colline's rich imagination and unanimously agreed that the mistress must be a myth.

But they soon learnt otherwise. That same evening Marcel received the following collective letter to all his friends:—

Mr. and Mrs. Rodolphe request the pleasure of your company at dinner tomorrow at 5 o'clock sharp.

N.B.—There will be plates.

"Gentlemen", said Marcel communicating the contents to his friends, "the great news is confirmed. Rodolphe really has a mistress.. More, he invites us over to dinner and the post-scripts.. That seems to me a poetical exaggeration, but we'll see."

The following day at the time indicated, Marcel, Gustave Colline and Schaunard, starved as on the last day of Lent, went to Rodolphe's. They found him with a young lady playing with

a scarlet cat.

"Gentlemen," Rodolphe said shaking hands with his friends and indicating the young lady, "permit me to present to you the mistress of the house."

"And you are the master, aren't you?" asked Colline.

"Mimi," said Rodolphe, "let me present my best friends to you. Now go and get dinner ready."

"Oh Madam!" said Schaunard precipitating himself towards Mimi, "you are as fresh as a wild flower."

After convincing himself that there were plates on the table Schaunard wanted to find out what there was to eat. His curiosity even drove him to lift the lid of the pan in which the dinner was cooking. The presence of a lobster made a deep impression on him.

Colline drew Rodolphe aside and asked for news about his article.

"It's with the printers. *The Castor* appears next Thursday."

The philosopher was overwhelmed with joy.

"Gentlemen," said Rodolphe addressing his friends, "I apologise for not having seen you for so long, but I was on my honeymoon." And he related the story of his marriage with the charming girl who brought as her dowry her eighteen years and six months, two porcelain cups and a red cat which was named after her, Mimi.

"This gentlemen," said Rodolphe, "is the house-warming. It will be a simple affair and truffles will be replaced by sincere cordiality."

Friendliness reigned throughout the entire meal and in spite of Rodolphe's warning of frugality it did not lack sophistication. Rodolphe was lively and animated. Colline, seeing that the plates were often changed, observed that Mimi was worthy of the Blue Sash as the Empress of the kitchen, a decoration which the young girl completely misunderstood.

The entrance on the scene of the lobster caused general admiration. Under the pretext that he had studied natural history Schaunard demanded to carve up the lobster. He broke a knife in the process and caused general indignation by serving himself the largest portion. Colline reserved his sympathies for the dessert and cruelly forewent his share of cake and Versailles oranges to Schaunard for it.

Conversation now flowed freely. Three bottles of red wine were succeeded by three bottles of green wine in between which appeared a bottle of champagne, a product of Saint-Owen, and sold in Paris at two francs a bottle. The Bohemians accepted it as genuine liquor and had it served in ad hoc glasses. When

it was opened, the cork was not very vivacious, but they were overjoyed to see the quantity of foam.

Schaunard constantly changed his glass with Colline who, gravely soaking his biscuit in the mustard, explained to Mimi his article which was to appear in *The Castor*. Then suddenly he turned pale and asked permission to go to the window to see the sunset although it was six o'clock and the sun had set a long while ago.

"It's a pity the champagne isn't iced," said Schaunard trying unsuccessfully to exchange his empty glass for Colline's full one.

"Madam," Colline said to Mimi, who had now dropped her aloofness, "one cools champagne with ice and ice is formed by the condensation of water—*aqua* in Latin. Water freezes at two-degrees and there are four seasons, summer, winter, autumn. That was the cause of the retreat from Russia. Rodolphe gave me a hemstitch of champagne."

"What does he mean?" Mimi, who did not understand, asked Rodolphe.

"Colline means half a glass," replied Rodolphe.

Suddenly Colline clapped Rodolphe on the shoulder and asked in a perplexed voice:

"Tomorrow will be Thursday, won't it?"

"No, tomorrow will be Sunday."

"No...Thursday."

"Once more I tell you tomorrow will be Sunday."

"Sunday!" Colline said rolling his head from side to side, "Thursday...tomorrow..."

And he fell asleep with his face in the cream cheese on his plate.

"What was he saying about Thursday?" asked Marcel.

"Ah! I understand now!" exclaimed Rodolphe suddenly comprehending the philosopher's insistence. "It's because of his article in *The Castor*. He's dreaming of it too soon..."

"Good!" said Schaunard, "He can't have any coffee now, can he Madam?"

"Yes," said Rodolphe, "serve the coffee Mimi."

When she rose Colline, who had recovered a little, pulled her back and whispered confidentially in her ear.

"Madam," he said, "coffee originates from Arabia where it was discovered by a goat. The practice passed to Europe. Voltaire drank 72 cups a day. I like it without sugar but very hot."

"What a clever man!" thought Mimi.

The time passed. Midnight had struck long ago and Rodolphe tried to make his friends realise that it was time they

left. Marcel, who was completely sober, got up. But Schaunard, seeing that there was still some brandy left in a bottle, declared that it was not midnight yet. And Colline, seated astride his chair, murmured in a low voice :

"Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday..."

"I can't keep them here all night!" said Rodolphe in a perplexed voice. "Formerly, yes, but not now," he added looking at Mimi whose eloquent expression demanded solitude.

"What can I do? Advise me Marcel. Invent something to get them out."

"I won't invent," replied Marcel, "but I'll imitate a comedy in which a valet was able to get rid of three drunks from his master's house."

"Yes, I remember," said Rodolphe, "It's in Kean. The situation is the same."

"We shall see if the theatre is the mirror of nature," said Marcel. "Wait a minute. We'll start with Schaunard. Hey! Schaunard!" shouted the painter.

"Eh? what?" asked Schaunard, swimming in the depths of intoxication.

"There's nothing more to drink here and we are thirsty."

"Yes!" agreed Schaunard, "These bottles are so small!"

"Quite," said Marcel, "Rodolphe says we can spend the night here. But we must get something before the shops close..."

"My grocer is at the corner of the road," said Rodolphe. "You go Schaunard. Bring me two bottles of rum..."

"Oh! Yes! Yes!" said Schaunard staggering out of the room and taking Colline's coat with him by mistake.

"One!" said Marcel. "Now for Colline. That's going to be more difficult. Ah! I know! Colline!" he called shaking the philosopher violently.

"What!...What..."

"Schaunard has left taking your overcoat by mistake!"

Colline looked around the room and saw that his overcoat had disappeared. A sudden thought crossed his mind and filled it with uneasiness. According to his usual habit he had gone round bookstalls and bought a Finnish grammar, and a novel entitled *The Milkwoman's Funeral* by Mr. Nisard. Besides these two acquisitions were seven or eight volumes of philosophy which he usually carried on him as a reference in the event of any philosophic discussion. The thought of what would happen to his library in Schaunard's hands made him turn cold.

"Good Lord!" cried Colline, "why has he taken my coat?"

"By mistake."

"But my books!...He'll misuse them!"

"Have no fear. He won't read them," said Rodolphe.

"I know that. But he'll light his pipe with them!"

"You'd better get them, then," said Rodolphe. "He's just gone out..., he must be at the door..."

"I certainly will..." said Colline putting on his hat whose brim was so broad that tea could easily be served for six under it.

"Two!" said Marcel to Rodolphe. "You're free now. I'm going and I'll tell the janitor not to open if anyone knocks."

"Good night," said Rodolphe, "And thanks."

When he left his friend at the door Rodolphe heard a prolonged mew which was immediately answered by another prolonged mew from his own cat trying to escape by the half open door.

"Poor Romeo!" said Rodolphe, "Here's your Juliette! Go on!" he said opening the door and the enamoured beast with a bound from the stairs landed near the paws of its lover.

Left alone with his mistress who, standing before a mirror, was combing her hair in a charming and provocative attitude, Rodolphe approached Mimi and put his arms round her. Then like a musician who, before he begins his piece, first tries out his instrument by striking a few chords, Rodolphe seated the young Mimi on his lap and imprinted on her shoulder a long and noisy kiss, which caused a sudden vibration in the body of the young creature.

The instrument was responsive.

## CHAPTER XIV

### MISS MIMI

"O my dear Rodolphe what has happened to change you thus? Can I believe the rumour that your robust philosophy of life has been shattered? How can I, the ordinary historian of your Bohemian epic, how can I relate the painful adventure which draws a veil over your unflinching gaiety and suddenly stops your paradoxes?"

O Rodolphe, my friend, though the malady may be a grievous one, I hope it will not prove fatal. But how long can you bear such a cross? I know your solitude must be peopled with phantoms which perpetuate your sorrows and silence will echo with the remembrance of your past joys and regrets. But throw courageously to the wind of forgetfulness the name you loved so much and all its associations, locks of hair, Venetian bottles, in which the perfume still lingers, and would prove more dangerous for you to inhale than all the poisons in the world; throw into the fire the flowers, the flowers of gauze, silk and velvet, the white Jasmins and Anemones, made red with the blood of Adonis.

the blue forget-me-nots and all the bouquets she accepted from you in the far off days of your short lived happiness. There is no danger then of being reminded of her every side you turn. Follow my advice, my dear Rodolphe, and throw into the fire the pretty red, blue and yellow ribbons, with which she bought an excited glance; into the fire the laces and the caps, the veils and all the finery with which she won the hearts of Cesar, Jerome and Charles while you stood and waited for her at the window shivering in the wind and the frost; into the fire all that belonged to her, and can still remind you of her, including the letters over which you cried like a child, my unfortunate friend!

As you did not return I have gone to visit my aunt. I have taken some money for a carriage. Lucille.

Do you remember how happy you were that evening because you really believed Lucille had gone to visit her aunt? If I had told you she was with Cesar you would certainly have wanted to cut my throat!

And then there is that other note which contains the same laconic tenderness as the first.

I must have shoes. You must find the money for them. I shall call for them tomorrow. Lucille.

Those shoes my friend have danced quadrilles in places you have never been! Into the flames all such souvenirs and to the wind their ashes!

For the sake of humanity, and the greater glory of *L'Escharpe à'Iris* and *The Castor* pull yourself together and conquer your egotistic suffering. Otherwise something horrible will happen and you alone will be responsible for it. Be advised and return to the leg-o'-mutton sleeves and panties and fashionable hat to enrage the world and call forth the wrath of heaven.

It is now time we related the affair between our friend Rodolphe and Lucille, otherwise known as Mimi. It was when he was about twenty-four that Rodolphe fell so passionately in love with her that it affected the whole future course of his life. At the time he was leading that chaotic and fantastic life we have attempted to describe in previous scenes. It was the door which led him into the merry country of Bohemia. In the society in which he moved Rodolphe adopted the pose, common enough among young men, that love was a luxury and was only a subject for jest. Gustave Colline, who for a long time had lived with a seamstress whom he forced day and night to copy out

the manuscripts of his philosophical works, pretended that love was a sort of purgative to be taken at each new season to free the humours. In the midst of all these false sceptics Rodolphe was the only one who dared to speak with reverence of love and, when he did so, was forced to listen to encomiums on the goodness of friendship, the beauty of a peaceful blue lake, the song of the wind, the stars, etc., etc. Schaunard nicknamed him the 'harmonica' and Marcel called him 'the bald forget-me-not'. The truth was Rodolphe seriously believed he had done with youthful passion and love. He thought his heart was dead when it was really in a torpor, but ready to wake at any moment and respond to the joys and sorrows of a love he never anticipated, but for which he now suffered. He really does not deserve much of our pity and we know he will soon be healed.

Rodolphe met Mimi, whom he hardly knew, when she was the mistress of one of his friends. He made her his mistress. When his friends heard of it there was a great hue and cry. But as Mimi was comely without being a prude, endured pipe smoking and literary conversations, they soon got used to her and treated her like a comrade. Mimi was a charming girl with a nature particularly suited to the sensitive and poetic Rodolphe. She had a fine aristocratic face lit by scintillating blue eyes. But there were moments when annoyance or anger could transform her features into that of a cruel animal. Nevertheless, she was full of charming, tender smiles and glances full of imperious conquest. The blood of youth flowed warm and rapid in her veins and rose-tinted the camelia white transparency of her skin. This pale beauty completely captured Rodolphe who would often spend the night kissing the white forehead of his sleeping mistress whose humid and tired eyes, half-open, shone from under the curtain of its magnificent brown hair. But it was her hands which, in spite of household duties, she knew how to keep as white as the hands of the goddess of Idleness, that made Rodolphe fall madly in love with Mimi. But it was these hands, so frail, so dainty and soft to the touch of the lips, between which Rodolphe had placed his heart, it was these hands which, with their cruel nails, were to tear apart the poet's sensitive heart.

Before the end of a month Rodolphe realised he was wedded to a tempest. Besides his mistress had one great weakness. She had made friends with most of the women in the neighbourhood and spent much of her time in one or other of their houses. They were rich and had such great influence over Mimi, who had hitherto been simple and modest in her demands, that she began to dream of all sorts of impossible things, of silks, velvet and lace. In spite of Rodolphe's protests she continued to visit her women friends, who were soon able to persuade her to break

off with the Bohemian who could hardly afford to give her five hundred francs for a new dress.

"You are so pretty," they told her, "you could easily find another. You have only to look around."

And Mimi began to search. She was out more frequently, making the most clumsy excuses. Rodolphe became suspicious. But in spite of her obvious infidelity he closed his eyes to it. Whatever may be her drawbacks he adored Mimi. He had for her that peculiar jealous, fantastic and quarrelsome love which Mimi had never quite understood. In fact she did not believe Rodolphe loved her at all but was merely attached to her like a bad habit. Besides she discovered that he still had not got over his first love. One half of his heart was still being consumed with the memory of it.

Eight months thus elapsed alternated by good and bad days. During this period he had on more than twenty occasions resolved to break off with Mimi who possessed all the clumsy cruelty of the woman who is not in love. In truth life had become a hell for both of them. But Rodolphe had become accustomed to their daily wrangles and feared nothing so much as being separated from Mimi. Besides he felt he could never stand up to the sorrow into which he would inevitably have been plunged. Moreover, it must be admitted that there were moments which completely dissipated the suspicions which clawed at his heart. There were moments when, like a child, she would sit on his lap and gaze into his blue eyes responsive to every nuance of his poetical affection for her. Two or three times a month their incessant quarrels would cease and they would enjoy a blissful night of love and intimate chatter. Rodolphe would hold her smiling, animated face between his hands and surrender himself to that absurd but charming language that passion improvises in its most delirious moments. Mimi would at first listen to him unmoved, more surprised than touched, but in the end Rodolphe's passionate eloquence, by turns melancholy, tender and gay, would gradually win her over. The icy indifference of her heart would melt, his feverish importunations capture her, and she would throw her arms round his neck and sav with kisses what she could not with words. The dawn would surprise them thus in each other's arms gazing lovingly into each other's eyes with the unexpressed pledge of eternal love hanging on their burning lips.

But the very next day they quarrelled on the flimsiest excuse and love would be driven underground for some time.

But Rodolphe slowly came to realise that if he was not careful the pale white hands of Mimi would lead him into an abyss in which he would lose both his youth and his ambitions. At one

moment he would listen to the voice of austere truth and reason out the infidelity of his mistress. He convinced himself that the tenderness which she sometimes revealed for him was only the manoeuvre of young married women when they were urgently in need of a new dress or hat. In short, Rodolphe could forgive his wife anything except for the fact that she did not love him. He made his final decision and told Mimi she would have to look out for a new lover. Mimi began to laugh and boast. But when she realised that Rodolphe was in earnest and greeted her indifferently when she returned after being out for a day and night she became uneasy. She was not accustomed to such firmness in him. For the next two or three days she would be charming and attentive. But she found him unshakeable and Rodolphe would coldly ask her if she had found someone else.

"I have only to look," she would reply.

In fact she had been looking around even before Rodolphe announced his decision. So far she had met two possible lovers. A friend had introduced her to a young lad who made her eyes shine with the promise of delightful comforts like ebony furniture and Cashmere shawls. But as the young collegian, who was very strong in algebra, was very inexperienced in love, and as Mimi had no desire to educate him, she left him to browse among his ebony furniture and Cashmere shawls.

The collegian was replaced by a Breton lord with whom Mimi was soon infatuated dreaming that it would not be long before she became a countess.

Rodolphe, in spite of protests from his mistress, kept a close watch on her movements. He wanted to know exactly where he stood. The morning following the night she had been out he ran to the house he suspected she must have gone to. He did not have to wait long before she appeared. Her eyes ablaze with voluptuous delight, she emerged from the house hanging on to the arm of her new lord and master who, however, did not appear to be quite as proud as the handsome Greek shepherd, Paris, after he had abducted the beautiful Helen.

Mimi was surprised to meet Rodolphe. She went up and spoke indifferently to him for about five minutes. They separated each going his own way. The rupture was complete.

When he returned home he spent his time sorting out all that belonged to his mistress. The next day when several of his friends visited him he disclosed what had happened. They all congratulated him and told him he should be very thankful.

"We'll help you," one of them, who had witnessed the miseries Mimi had heaped on the poet, said, "we'll help you to escape from the clutches of a wicked woman. Don't worry, you'll soon get over it and ready to take other Mimis to d'Aulnay

and Foutenay-aux-Roses!"

Rodolphe felt he had already got over it and even went to the Mabilie ball. He met new friends and began to drink. He related his recent misfortune with a certain ironic gaiety and was a lively and spirited companion throughout the evening.

"Alas! Alas!" exclaimed Marcel, the painter, listening to his friend, "Rodolphe's too gay, much too gay!"

"I think he's charming!" said a young lady who had received a bouquet from Rodolphe, "I do wish he'd ask me to dance."

Two seconds later Rodolphe, who had overheard, was on his feet extending an invitation which contained all the poetical gallantries he could think of. His language, studded with dazzling adjectives and distorted metaphors, quite confounded the young lady. But the invitation was accepted.

Rodolphe ignored all the elementary rules of the dance and with extraordinary audacity improvised his own. His friends called it "the dance of sighs and regrets" and its originality brought him incredible success. Rodolphe quoted poetry to his partner and the three thousand gas burners gazed with human astonishment on the strange sight before them.

"This is incredible!" said Marcel, "Rodolphe looks like a drunken man rolling on glass!"

"She's a fine girl," said another watching Rodolphe flying around with his partner.

"Rodolphe's partner was a girl from Normandy, a rustic heart which had become sophisticated amidst the elegances and idleness of Parisian life. Her name was Seraphine and was the mistress of an old man named Rhumatisme who allowed her fifty Louis a month which she shared with a cruel young gentleman who often beat her. Rodolphe pleased her, she hoped for nothing from him, and took him home with her.

She went into her room and after five minutes returned wearing a special dress. She found Rodolphe inert and silent for, since his entrance, he had been, in spite of himself, forced into the dark region of painful remembrance.

"Why don't you look at me and speak to me?" asked the astonished Seraphine.

"I'll look," said Rodolphe lifting his head, "but only for art's sake!"

And what a spectacle he saw! Seraphine was a really beautiful girl. Her splendid figure, always fashionably clothed, was now encased in a transparent and provocative dress. All the imperious demands of feverish desire were immediately awakened in Rodolphe's veins. A warm fog rose and clouded his head. He rose and took her hands in his, beautiful hands equal to the purest chiselled on any Greek statuary. They

trembled in his. Feeling less and less the art critic he drew the girl towards him. Her face was flushed and excited.

"She is a true instrument of love," Rodolphe thought, "a genuine Stradivarius of love on whom I would willingly play any tune."

He drew her close to him until he could distinctly feel the quickening beat of her heart.

Suddenly a violent ringing was heard at the apartment door.

"Please Lucille! Don't come in. Say I'm out." Seraphine cried to her chambermaid.

When he heard the name Lucille Rodolphe shook himself awake.

"I won't trouble you any longer," he said. "Besides it's very late and I live far away. Goodnight."

"What! You're going?" Seraphine asked with appealing anxiety. "Why, why, are you going? I am free, you can stay."

"Impossible!" replied Rodolphe, "I am expecting a relative of mine and he'll disinherit me if he does not find me at home to welcome him. Goodnight madam!"

And he left in haste. The servant followed him to light his way. Rodolphe inadvertently raised his eyes towards her. She was a frail young woman with a slow gait. Her pale face was a charming contrast to her dark and naturally curly hair and her blue eyes shone like two sick stars.

"A phantom!" exclaimed Rodolphe recoiling from the girl who bore the name and face of his mistress. "Go away! What do you want?" And he hurriedly descended the staircase.

"That young man's mad!" the chambermaid told her mistress when she returned.

"He's a beast!" replied Seraphine with exasperation. "If only Leon would come now!"

Leon was the cruel young man who, in his tenderness, used a horsewhip.

Rodolphe reached home out of breath. Climbing the stairs he heard his scarlet cat mewing plaintively by itself. For the past two nights now it had been waiting and calling vainly for her unfaithful lover.

"Poor beast!" said Rodolphe, "you have been deceived too! We'll console each other. You see, my poor beast, the heart of a woman and a cat is an abyss that men and cats can not fathom."

When he entered his room, which was very warm, Rodolphe felt a mantle of ice descend on his shoulders. It was the cold solitude of the lonely night. He lit the candle and looked around his devastated room. The cupboards were open, their drawers

were empty and an immense sadness enveloped the small room from floor to ceiling which now seemed to him as vast as a desert. When he walked across he trampled on some of Mimi's belongings. He was overjoyed to discover that she had not yet arrived to take them as she said she would. Rodolphe, though he fought against it, felt a sudden reaction set in. He knew a sleepless, atrocious night was before him to overshadow the joy he had felt all evening. But since he felt tired he hoped he would sleep and dawn would disperse the anguish he now felt in his heart.

He approached the bed and threw aside the curtains. It was untouched. The two pillows still lay side by side and from under one of them was a half-hidden bonnet. Rodolphe suddenly felt his heart being clasped in that invincible vice of sorrow that nothing could break. He dropped heavily at the foot of the bed, glanced for a second round the desolated room and buried his face in his hands.

"Mimi darling," he said, "joy of my home, is it true you have left, that I won't see you again? Won't I see your pretty brown head on these pillows again? Won't I ever hear your caressing voice again? Have I kissed your lovely white hands for the last time?"

Rodolphe fell into a delirium of sorrow plunging his head into the pillow which still exhaled the perfume of his mistress. Slowly before his mind passed the phantom scenes of the nights he had spent with her. In the silence he could clearly hear her gay laughter and he recalled her charming and courageous merri-ment which had so often made him forget the sorrows and miseries of his hazardous life. He lay awake the whole night constantly reviewing the eight months he had spent with Mimi, who, though she may not have loved him yet, during that period, surrendered to him her youth and her beauty.

The dawn found him defeated and exhausted. He closed his eyes which were red with tears shed during the night.

When his friends visited him later in the day they were astonished. Rodolphe's features were ravaged with anguish as if he had spent the evening on the Mount of Olives of love.

"I knew it," said Marcel, "His gaiety yesterday evening has turned in his heart." And then later, joined by two or three friends, he began a tirade against Mimi each word of which pierced Rodolphe's heart like a thorn. They proved to him that his mistress had always treated him like a simpleton and deceived him, that though she outwardly looked like a pale angel she was the repository of selfishness and ferocious instincts. Listening to them the poet gradually became bitter and contemptuous, and at last became angry. He picked up the parcels he

had made the previous evening and, sorting out those which he had given her, the greater part, hurled the rest aside..

Mimi came the next day for her things. Rodolphe was alone. He found he had to summon all his strength not to fall at his mistress' feet and beg her to return. He greeted her coldly and Mimi answered with the same cold indifference. Rodolphe, confronted by such insolent disdain, slowly felt his anger rising until it suddenly broke, frightful and alarming. For an instant Mimi, white with terror, asked herself if she would leave the room alive. She began to scream and some of the neighbours ran in and led her out of the room.

Two days later one of Mimi's friends visited Rodolphe to ask if he were going to return her things.

"No," he replied.

But he spoke to Mimi's messenger. The young lady told him that Mimi was in a very unhappy state and had nowhere to live.

"What about her lover whom she's so mad about?"

"The young man has no intention of making her his mistress," replied Amelia, "He's had one for a long time and seems little interested in Mimi. She is in my charge and it worries me..

"She's got what she wanted," said Rodolphe, "It's no business of mine..." And he praised Amelia and told her she was the most beautiful woman in the world.

Amelia told Mimi of her interview with Rodolphe.

"What did he say? What did he do?" demanded Mimi, "Did you speak of me?"

"You are already forgotten, my dear. Rodolphe has a new mistress. He has bought her a fine toilet set having received a lot of money lately. He himself is dressed like a prince. He is very nice and said the most charming things to me."

"I can quite believe it," thought Mimi.

Amelia went to see Rodolphe almost every day on some pretext or another.

"She is happy now," she told Rodolphe "She says she can return to you whenever she wants to, if only to make your friends angry."

"We'll see when she comes," said he.

Rodolphe again made love to Amelia who conveyed everything to Mimi assuring her that Rodolphe was in love with her.

"He kissed me on my hands and neck," Amelia said, "See they are still red, and he wants to take me to the ball tomorrow."

"My dear," said Mimi slightly piqued, "I see what you're after. You want me to believe Rodolphe is in love with you and that he has forgotten me. But you are wasting your time with him and with me."

The truth was Rodolphe was not in love with Amelia and only encouraged her to visit him so often in order that he could speak of his mistress.

On the day of the ball Amelia went to Rodolphe's to ask him if his invitation still held good.

"Of course," Rodolphe replied, "I don't want to miss being the Chevalier to the most beautiful woman in the world!"

Amelia was pleased. She told him that she was making her debut as a fourth chambermaid in a suburban theatre that evening but would be ready.

"Tell Mimi," Rodolphe said, "that if she wants to she can see me tonight and I'll return her things."

Amelia conveyed Rodolphe's message but so distorted it that it seemed more an insult than an invitation.

"Your Rodolphe is an ignoble man," she told Mimi, "I think his proposal is infamous. He wants to drag you down to the level of a common woman. If you see him you'll only be the laughing stock of his friends. It's a conspiracy arranged among themselves."

"Don't worry, I won't go," said Mimi. And when she saw Amelia dressing she asked if she was going to the ball.

"Yes," replied Amelia.

"With Rodolphe?"

"Yes. He'll wait for me down the street."

"Have a good time," said Mimi.

Mimi waited for a little while and when the time for the rendezvous approached nearer she ran quickly to Amelia's lover and warned him that she was about to betray him by going out with her old lover.

The gentleman, brutal and jealous as a tiger, immediately ran to Amelia and told her that as he was free it would be beautiful if they could spend the evening together.

At eight o'clock Mimi was at the spot where Rodolphe had arranged to meet Amelia. She saw her lover walking up and down. She passed him twice but dared not accost him. Rodolphe was elegantly dressed and the sorrow he had endured during the past eight days lent character to his face. Mimi felt singularly moved. At last she decided to speak to him. Rodolphe welcomed her without anger and inquired after her health. He told her of his appointment with Amelia. He spoke to her in a quiet voice tinged with melancholy.

"I have had news for you. Amelia can't go to the ball. She is with her lover."

"I'll go alone, then" replied Rodolphe.

At this moment Mimi pretended to fall and held on to Rodolphe's shoulder. He took her by the arm and said he would

escort her home.

"No," said Mimi, "I live with Amelia and since she is with her lover I can't return."

"Did you get my message? Did Amelia tell you?" asked the poet.

"Yes, but I won't come on those terms. I don't want to be the laughing stock of your friends."

"But there's some mistake. My message has been wrongly conveyed. Anyway it is eight o'clock now and I'll give you three hours to think it over. My key will be on my door till midnight. Good evening, *adieu* or *au revoir*."

"Adieu," said Mimi in a trembling voice.

They parted. Rodolphe returned home and threw himself fully dressed on his bed. At 11-15 Mimi entered his room.

"I've come for a little while," she said, "Amelia's lover is still with her and I can't go in."

They talked till three in the morning. At first the conversation was strained and courteous but as time passed it became more and more familiar and intimate.

At four o'clock the candle burnt out. Rodolphe said he would light a new one.

"No," said Mimi, "it's time we went to bed."

Five minutes later her pretty brown head lay on her own pillow. She held out her small white hands for Rodolphe to kiss. Rodolphe did not light another candle.

The next morning Rodolphe was the first to wake. He held up several of Mimi's belongings.

"These are yours, I think. You can have them back. You see, I keep my word."

"I'm very tired," replied Mimi, "I can't take all those things at once. I'll come back for them."

When she was dressed she took up a collar and a pair of cuffs.

"I'll take the rest...little by little," she said smiling.

"Take all or take nothing," said Rodolphe.

Mimi ran up and threw her arms around him.

After having breakfasted together they left for the country. As they crossed the Luxembourg Rodolphe saw a great poet who usually gave him a cheerful greeting. Under the circumstances he felt it would be best to pretend he had not recognised him. But the famous poet refused to be ignored. He saluted Rodolphe with a friendly gesture and a gracious smile.

"Who was that?" Mimi asked.

Rodolphe mentioned a name which made her turn red with pride and pleasure.

"He is the great poet of love," said Rodolphe, "And our

meeting him augurs well for our future."

"I love you," said Mimi taking her lover's hand even though they were in the middle of a huge crowd.

## CHAPTER XV

### DONEC GRATUS

WE have already related how the painter Marcel met Musette. They were both of them extremely capricious people, and one evening after a violent quarrel they decided that the best thing to do was to separate. But when they bid each other goodbye they suddenly realised that they continued to hold each other's hands. Something new had developed in their relationship. They began to laugh.

"But this is serious," said Marcel, "How did this happen?"

"It's very stupid of us," said Musette, "we should have taken precautions."

"What's the matter?" asked Rodolphe, who was now Marcel's neighbour, entering.

"Musette and I have made a discovery," said Marcel, "We're in love!"

"What makes you think so?" questioned Rodolphe, "Aren't you exaggerating?"

"We detest each other..." began Marcel.

"But we cannot leave each other," concluded Musette.

"Ah, my dear children," said Rodolphe "your's is a very clear case. You have played to the end and lost. It was the same with Mimi and I. Thus are marriages made immortal. Your case is very similar to mine. And if Phémie and Schaunard could live here, as they threaten, I think it would be very pleasant."

At this juncture Gustave Colline entered the room. They told him what had happened between Marcel and Musette.

"What do you think of it," they asked him.

"I knew it," said Colline scratching the hair of his roof-like hat, "Love is a dangerous game. They who meddle with it must in the end be stung. But man was not meant to live alone."

When Rodolphe returned home he retailed the news to Mimi.

"Musette is crazy about Marcel," he told her, "and can't leave him."

"Poor girl!" replied Mimi. "And she has such a good appetite!"

"And Marcel just adores Musette."

"Poor man!" exclaimed Mimi. "And he is so jealous!"

"That's true," agreed Rodolphe. "He and I are Othello's pupils."

Some time later Schaunard and Phémie shifted in to join their friends. From that day onwards the neighbours had no peace. They felt they lived on the crater of a volcano and at the end of the month gave the landlord notice. The fact was not a day passed without an uproar in one or other of the households. Sometimes it was Rodolphe and Mimi, who, having exhausted themselves in speech, hurled whatever they could lay hands on, at each other. But more often it was Schaunard and Phémie. Schaunard made liberal use of the cane on the unfortunate Phémie. Marcel and Musette conducted their discussions behind closed doors and windows.

If by any chance a transitory peace reigned among the Bohemians the other tenants were not less relieved. The flimsy, indiscreet partitions brought all the secrets of the Bohemian households to their ears and initiated them, in spite of the themselves, into all their mysteries. More than one neighbour preferred war to such a declaration of peace.

In truth for the next six months the Bohemians led almost singular life. They practised among themselves the most loyal and emphatic fraternity. All was for all and they shared alike in periods of good and bad fortune. There were certain days in the month when they would not dare go into the streets without gloves, splendid merry days when they ate and drank at all times. There were others on which they were nearly forced to walk out without shoes, lenten days on which they dined and breakfasted together to realise that barest economics and plates were dispensed with, as Mimi said. But the most amazing fact was that even though there were so many young and pretty women among them the relations between the men were peaceful and perfect. They would each of them succumb to the most futile caprices of their mistresses but none hesitated in his allegiance to friend or mistress. Love is a spontaneous emotion while friendship, on the contrary, is cautious and circumspect. Friendship is the egotism of the mind as love is the egotism of the heart.

The Bohemians had now been friends for the past six years. In the daily intimacy of this period none had altered or surrendered his individuality and there existed between them a happy intellectual concord which could never have been found elsewhere. Their moral outlook was similar, and to them, correct, and no stranger could find the key to the intimate language they used. Those who did not understand them called their liberty of behaviour cynicism. To them it was only freedom. Their stub-

born minds<sup>4</sup> hated and scorned all the social customs of the day. When they were accused of vanity they would proudly disclose their ambitious programmes for the future and having the courage of their convictions they never let each other down. In all the time they had known each other, an association born more out of necessity than anything else, they had never allowed questions of personal prestige and self-love to interfere and envy never awoke those petty jealousies of men devoted to the fine arts.

Nevertheless after having lived together for six months an epidemic of divorce broke out among the three households. Schaunard was the first to fall a prey to it. One day he noticed that one of Phémie's knees was more shapely than the other and, being an austere purist in plastics, he sent her away, giving her the cane he had so often used on her as a souvenir. He lived with a relation who kindly offered him a free room.

Fifteen days later Mimi deserted Rodolphe for the fine luxuries provided by the young Vicount Paul, the former pupil of Carolus Barbemuche.

After Mimi it was Musette's turn. She returned to the noise and bombast of the aristocratic world she had left to follow Marcel. This separation took place without a quarrel, without a blow and was unpremeditated. Born of a caprice their affair was terminated by another.

At a masked ball at the Opera, where she had accompanied Marcel, Musette, in one of the dances, met a young man who formerly paid court to her. They recognised each other immediately and while dancing together, exchanged a few words. Unintentionally, while telling the young man of her present life, she spoke with regret of her former life. The result was, before the end of the quadrille, she had arrived at a decision and taking the young man's arm, disappeared into the crowd.

Marcel searched everywhere for her, his mind uneasy and disquieted, and at the end of an hour found her arm in arm with the young man. When Musette saw him she made a sign to him as if to say: "I'll come back."

But Marcel interpreted it otherwise. He was jealous but he had common sense and knew Musette. He left the Opera and returned home. His heart was heavy and his stomach light. He searched in the cupboard for something to eat. He found a slice of dry bread and the remains of a red herring.

"I cannot fight against riches," he thought, "Musette at least will have supper."

And after passing the end of his moustache over an eye as if wiping it, he fell asleep.

Two days later Musette awoke in a luxurious rose-coloured

boudoir. A blue sedan stood at her door and, all the fairies of fashion having been requisitioned, parcels of marvellous things were piled up at her feet. Musette looked ravishing and in the midst of these elegances her very youth seemed to rejuvenate. She returned to her old life, was to be seen everywhere and at all entertainments and soon regained her former celebrity. They discussed her at all the restaurants and saloons and even on the stock exchange. Her new lover, Alexis, was a charming young man. But he often complained that, when he spoke to her of his love, she was frivolous and indifferent. Musette in reply would laugh and smack him on the hand and say :

"What do you expect, my dear? For six months I lived with a man who fed me on salad and soup, who dressed me in the poorest of dresses and took me to the Odéon because he wasn't rich. As love cost him nothing, and I loved him, we lived only on love. Only the crumbs remain. You can gather them if you like. I won't stop you. I'll be frank with you. If ribbons weren't so expensive I would still be with my painter. As for my heart, since I can't hear it beat at all, I must have left it back in one of his drawers."

The break up of the three households occasioned a Bohemian feast. As a sign of rejoicing the landlord gave a big dinner and the tenants hung lights from their windows.

Rodolphe and Marcel were living together. Silently and in hearts they each worshipped an idol and sometimes of an evening when they were alone they would speak of Mimi and Musette. They would regretfully recall their old life, the songs that Mimi and Musette would sing, the sleepless nights the lazy mornings and dinners eaten in a dream. One by one they would live again in their memories the vanished hours. But they generally concluded by maintaining they were still happy smoking their pipes with their feet on the fender, that they still had each others' companionship when they could talk aloud about the things which were nearest to their hearts. They admitted they had loved the women who had brought them so much happiness and had now deserted them and reluctantly revealed that perhaps they still loved them.

One evening when he was crossing the boulevard Marcel's gaze was arrested by the pretty ankle of a young girl getting down from a carriage. Even the coachman stared with open eyes.

"That's a pretty ankle!" said Marcel to himself, "I must talk to her...But what excuse shall I give?"

"Excuse me Madam," he said going up to the young woman whose face he had not yet seen, "But have you by any chance seen my handkerchief?"

"Yes!" replied the girl, "here it is." And she put a handkerchief into Marcel's hand.

The artist was dumb with astonishment. But suddenly a burst of laughter in his face brought him back to his senses. He recognised her. It was Musette.

"Ah!" she cried, "In search of adventure? How do you find me?"

"Tolerable," replied Marcel.

"What are you doing at this hour here?" demanded Musette.

"I was going in there," Marcel said pointing to a small theatre.

"Love or art?"

"For love of Laure."

"Who is Laure?"

"She is a chimera I pursue."

"You're very witty this evening."

"And you're very curious."

"Everybody can hear us. Speak softly. They may mistake us for lovers, quarrelling."

"It won't be the first time," replied Marcel.

"And the last time?" Musette added quickly.

Walking along Musette shyly glanced at Marcel and Marcel shyly glanced at her. They did not speak, but their eyes, those ambassadors of the heart, often met. At the end of a quarter of an hour of such silent diplomacy the congress of looks had settled the entire business. It remained only to be ratified.

"Tell me frankly," said Musette at last, "where are you going?"

"I've told you, to see Laure."

"Is she pretty?"

"Her mouth is a nest of smiles."

"I see," said Musette.

"But what about you," said Marcel "what are you doing in a coach?"

"I dropped Alexis at the station. He is visiting his parents."

"What sort of a man is this Alexis of yours?"

In her turn Musette painted a ravishing picture of her new lover. Strolling side by side they continued their little comedy. Like the immortal ode of Horace they boasted, with the same naivete, of the charms and graces of their new lovers and ended it by adding a postscript to their old love. When they arrived at a crossroads a group of soldiers suddenly emerged from round a corner.

"Troops!" exclaimed Musette pretending to be frightened and clutching Marcel's arm. "There's going to be a revolution! Take me away!"

"But where to?" demanded Marcel.

"My home! You'll see how pretty it is. And we'll discuss politics, and have supper."

"No," said Marcel, thinking of Alexis, "I won't come in spite of the offer of supper. I don't like drinking my wine in other people's glasses."

Musette was surprised at the refusal. Then through the fog of her memories she once again saw the shabby room of the poor artist. An idea entered her mind. When she saw another group of soldiers she showed fear again.

"I can't go home now," she said, "I dare not. Please take me to one of my friends who lives in your quarter."

Crossing the Neuf bridge Musette suddenly burst out laughing.

"What's the matter?" demanded Marcel.

"Nothing. Only my friend has now shifted to Batignolles!"

When Rodolphe saw Marcel and Musette arrive arm in arm he was not surprised.

"A badly buried love!" he said, "It's always like that!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### CROSSING THE RED SEA

FOR the last five or six years Marcel had worked on his famous picture which he maintained represented the crossing of the Red Sea and for the last five or six years the colourful masterpiece had been obstinately rejected by the Committee. Also it may be mentioned that by dint of being taken to and from the studio to the picture gallery the picture knew the road so well that if it were placed on wheels it could find its way to the Louvre by itself. Marcel who had repainted and remodelled it from top to bottom more than ten times over attributed its rejection to the personal hostility of the Committee members. And in one of his angry moods he had composed a dictionary of insults against the members embellished by the most ferocious illustrations. This collection, which had now become famous, had obtained in the studios and the schools of Fine Arts that popular success which the immortal complaint of Jean Belin had achieved in the past. All the art students in Paris kept a copy of it in their minds.

But the maddening rejection which each new exhibition

brought him did not discourage Marcel. He comforted himself with the thought that, in his opinion, his picture was, on a smaller scale, the equal of the Marriage of Cana, that gigantic masterpiece whose shining splendour even the dust of three centuries had not been able to dull. Marcel sent up his picture before the exhibition Committee every year. Only, to deceive the members and make them yield in their obvious determination to reject the picture again Marcel, without changing anything in its general composition, modified a few of its details and gave it another title. Thus once it appeared before the Committee with the title changed to 'The Crossing of the Rubicon.' But unfortunately Pharoah, who was badly disguised under Caesar's cloak, was recognised and rejected with all due respect to the mighty Roman. The Committee, who regularly wiped their glasses on the facings of their green coats, were not to be duped by this new trick. They were able easily to recognise the canvas particularly the huge multicoloured horse which reared on the edge of the Red Sea. In the coat of this animal Marcel had reproduced all gradations of colour and the combinations of light and shadow. In his own words it was "synoptic of fine tones." But once again the Committee, insensible to this detail, rejected 'The Crossing of the Beresina.'

"Very well," said Marcel, "I'll wait. Next year it will be called 'Crossing the Panoramas'."

"That will catch them...catch them...catch them...," sang the musician Schaunard to the tune of one of his latest compositions, a frightful one, as noisy as thunder, and whose accompaniment every neighbouring piano feared.

"How can they refuse my picture? Have they no sense of shame?" Marcel murmured to himself contemplating his picture. "It has cost me a hundred crowns in colours and then there is my youth and my genius. It is a serious work which opens up new horizons in the science of glazing. But they will not have the last word. I will send them my picture if it costs me my life. It shall be engraved on their memories."

Marcel continued his imprecations and Schaunard his music.

"They don't want to recognise me!" said Marcel, "The government pays them, lodges them and decorates them just to reject my picture on the first of March each year...I can now see their object. I can see it distinctly. They want to make me throw away my brushes. They think that by rejecting my Red Sea I will throw myself out of the window in despair! If they think I'll fall for their horrible trick they don't understand my humane heart. I know what to do. I won't even wait for the exhibition. From this day onwards my picture shall hang like Damocles' sword over their lives. I shall take my

picture to each member in turn, in their own homes in the bosom of their family, in their own private lives. I shall disturb their domestic happiness, turn their wine sour, their bread hard and their wives enemies. I will make them mad and they will perhaps visit the Academy in their camisole!" And Marcel smiled to himself over the thought.

Some days later when Marcel had entirely forgotten his terrible plans of vengeance against his persecutors he received a visit from Medicis. That was the name they had given a Jew named Solomon who at that time was well known to all the artistic and literary Bohemians with whom he was in constant contact. Old Medicis dealt with in all kinds of bric-a-brac. He sold things ranging in price from twelve francs to a thousand crowns. He bought almost anything and could resell it at a profit. Mr. Proudhon's banking system was nothing compared to Medicis' whose genius in his business outshone any other of his religion. His shop, situated in Corousel, was a fairyland in which anything you desired could be found. All the products of nature, all the creations of art, all that is drawn from the bowels of the earth and human genius had a place in his shop. His business touched everything including ideals and ideas. Medicis would buy ideas from some and resell them to others. Known to all literary men and artists, intimate with the palette and familiar with the inkpot, he was the Asmodeus of the Arts. He would exchange cigars for an article, slippers for a sonnet and fresh fish for paradoxes. He would chat by the hour to journalists who wrote the scandal columns for their paper; he could procure a seat for you in Parliament or invitations to a particularly exclusive entertainment; he would lodge errant art students for the night, a week or a month in return for copies of the masterpieces in the Louvre. There was absolutely nothing he could not do. He could even get your plays accepted for the theatre or get any other favour done. He kept about twenty five thousand addressés in his head and knew the houses, the names and the secrets of all the celebrities even the more obscure ones.

But a few pages from his books will give you a better idea of the universality of his transactions than any detailed explanation :

20th March 184...

—Sold to Mr. L..., antiquary, the compass of Archimedes used during the siege of Syracuse. 75 fr.

—Bought from Mr....journalist, the complete works of M..., member of the Academy. 10 fr.

—Sold to same a critical article on the complete works of

M..., member of the Academy. 30 fr.

—Sold to M..., member of the Academy a 12 column article of his complete works. 250 fr.

—Bought from Mr. R..., man of letters, a critical appreciation of the complete works of M... of the French Academy. 10 fr. plus 50 lbs. of coal and 2 lbs. of coffee.

—Sold to ..., a porcelain vase belonging to Madame du Barry 18 fr.

—Bought from Mr. B..., one lot of articles and the last three orthographical mistakes made by M...perfect of the Seine. 6 fr. plus a pair of Neapolitan shoes.

—Sold to Miss O..., a blond wig. 120 fr.

—Bought from Mr. M..., historical painter a series of gay drawings. 25 fr.

—Conveyed to Mr. Ferdinand the hour at which the Baroness R...de P...goes to mass. —To the same hired the small flat in Montmartre. The lot 30 fr.

—Sold to Mr. Isidore his portrait of Apollo. 30 fr.

—Sold to Miss ..., a pair of lobsters and six pairs of gloves. 30 fr. (Received 2 fr. 75 c.).

—For the same procured credit with Madame...modiste. (Price to be settled).

—Procured for Madame..., modiste the patronage of Miss R... (Received three yards of velvet and six yards of lace).

—Procured for Mr. R..., a man of letters credit worth 120 fr. on the newspaper...actually in liquidation. 5 fr. plus 2 lbs. of Moravian tobacco.

—Sold to Mr. Ferdinand two love letters. 12 fr.

—Bought from M...75 lbs. of his work entitled *Some Sub-Marine Revolutions*. 15 fr.

—Hired to the Countess of G...a Saxe service. 20 fr.

—Bought from M...journalist, 52 lines in his *Courier* of Paris. 100 fr. plus a chimney-piece ornament.

—Sold to Miss O...52 lines in the *Courier* of Paris of M... 300 fr. plus a chimney-piece ornament.

—To Miss S...G...hired a bed and a coupe for a day (no charge). (See account of Mis S...G..., *Folios* 26 and 27).

—Bought from Mr. Gustave C...a pamphlet on the linen-trade. 50 fr. plus a rare edition of the works of Flavius Joseph.

—To Miss S...G...some modern furniture. 5000 fr.

—For same paid chemist bill. 75 fr.

—For same paid dairy bill. 3 fr. 85 c.

Etc., etc., etc.

From these few citations one can see the immense scale on which the Jew Medicis operated. But, in spite of the few out-

standings of his infinitely eclectic business, it must be said that he had never been cheated by anyone.

When he entered the Bohemians' home, with that intelligent air that always distinguished him, the Jew immediately divined that he had arrived at a propitious moment. In fact, at the time the Bohemians had gathered together in Council and, under the presidentship of a ferocious appetite, discussed the serious question of bread and meat. It was Sunday and the last day of the month! A fatal and sinister day!

The appearance of Medicis was greeted by a joyous chorus of voices. They knew that the Jew was too avaricious with his time to waste it in paying social calls. His presence always announced a business deal.

"Good morning, Gentlemen," said the Jew. "And how are you?"

"Colline," said Rodolphe lying on his bed dulled exhausted with hunger, "exercise the duties of hospitality. Offer our host a chair. A host is sacred. I salute you in the name of Abraham," added the poet.

Colline pushed forward the Jew a sofa chair, which was as elastic as bronze, and said in a hospitable voice:

"Imagine yourself Cinna for a moment and open the sedge."

When Medicis fell into the chair and felt its hardness he immediately recognised it to be the one he had himself exchanged with Colline for a profession of faith which he sold to a politician who did not possess the genius for such improvisation. As he sat down the money in the Jew's pockets jingled and this melodious symphony threw the four Bohemians into a beautiful dream.

"We'll hear the song now," Rodolphe whispered to Marcel, "the accompaniment seems good."

"Mr. Marcel," said Medicis, "I have come to make your fortune. That is to say, I have come to offer you a superb opportunity to enter the artistic world. Art, Mr. Marcel, as you know, is an arid road leading to an oasis of glory."

"Medicis," said Marcel impatiently, "in the name of your patron saint speak briefly."

"Yes," said Colline, "as brief as King Pepin who was as concise, as you are the circumscised son of Jacob!"

There were cries of annoyance from the Bohemians who hoped that the floor would open and swallow up the philosopher.

"Well, to business," said the Jew disregarding the interruption. "A rich amateur whose picture gallery is destined to tour the whole of Europe has asked me to procure for him a series of remarkable pictures. I have come to make you an offer. In a word I am here to buy your 'Crossing the Red Sea'."

"For ready cash?" demanded Marcel.

"For ready cash," replied the Jew.

"Is that satisfactory?" asked Colline.

"Decidedly!" said Rodolphe furious. "Can't we do something to shut the mouth of this foolish beggar? Can't you see he's talking of crowns? Don't you hold anything sacred, you atheist?"

Colline climbed a chair and posed as Harpocrates, the god of silence.

"To continue Medicis," said Marcel showing the Jew his picture, "I shall leave it to you to fix the price of this unequalled work."

The Jew placed fifty new and beautiful crowns on the table.

"And then?" said Marcel, "that's only the advance guard."

"Mr. Marcel," said the Jew, "you know my first word is always my last. I will add nothing to it. Reflect. Fifty crowns, that is to say one hundred and fifty francs. It's a sum!"

"A small sum," replied Marcel, "It cost me fifty crowns of cobalt for Pharoah's cloak. Come, double the sum, round off the figures and I'll call you Leon X."

"That's my last price," said the Jew. "I won't add a sou more. But I offer everybody dinner with wine and dessert."

"Any more offers?" said Colline thumping the table thrice with his fist. "Gone!"

"Agreed," said Marcel.

"I will take the picture tomorrow," said the Jew, "come, the table is laid."

The four friends descended the stairs singing the chorus from the Huguenots: "To table! To Table!"

Medicis treated the Bohemians to a really magnificent feast. He offered them a crowd of things which they had never even seen before. It was at this dinner that Lobsters ceased any longer to be a myth to Schaunard, who, from now onwards, contracted a delirious passion for the amphibian.

The four Bohemians left the table as drunk as if they had spent a whole day in a vineyard. This deplorable drunkenness had one effect on Marcel. Passing his tailor's shop at 2 in the morning he wanted to awaken him to pay away a debt with the 150 francs he had received. It was only a glimmer of reason which still shone in Colline's mind, that held the artist back from falling into this precipice.

Eight days after this dinner Marcel discovered the gallery in which his picture had found a place. While passing down the Faubourg Saint-Honore who found himself in the middle of a crowd which stared curiously at a sign outside a shop. This sign was none other than Marcel's picture which Medicis had

sold to a provision merchant. Only the 'Crossing of the Red Sea' had another title with yet another modification. A steam boat had added and it was now called at the Port of Marceilles. A flattering ovation rose from the curious crowd at the sight of the picture. Marcél was triumphant and overjoyed.

"The voice of the people!" he murmured, "The voice of God!"

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE TOILET OF THE GRACES

MIMI, who was accustomed to sleeping through the greater part of the morning, one day suddenly awoke on the stroke of ten and was surprised at not seeing Rodolphe either beside her or in the room. The previous evening, before she fell asleep, she had seen him still at his desk working on an article which had been commissioned, and in the completion of which Mimi was particularly interested. In fact, the poet had promised, out of the proceeds of his article, to buy her a new dress which she had seen at the window of The Two Magots, a famous fancy goods store, which Mimi frequently visited. Ever since the work was started Mimi's mind was greatly preoccupied with its progress. She would often approach Rodolphe while he was writing and, leaning over his shoulder, gravely inquire:

"Is my dress progressing?"

"Don't worry, I've completed the sleeve," Rodolphe would reply.

One night when she heard Rodolphe crack his knuckles, a sign that usually indicated he was satisfied with his work, Mimi sat up on her bed and, poking her brown head through the curtains, asked:

"Is my dress completed?"

"In fact," replied Rodolphe, showing her four large pages covered with writing, "I have completed the bust."

"How lovely!" exclaimed Mimi, "Only the skirt remains. How many pages for a skirt?"

"That depends. But as you're not very big about twelve pages of fifty lines of thirty three letters should be enough."

"It's true I'm not big," replied Mimi seriously. "But I need plenty of material for a skirt. I want it to fall in folds and rustle when I walk."

"In that case," Rodolphe said gravely, "if I add ten more letters to each line you can have it rustling."

Mimi lay back happy on her bed.

She was imprudent enough to tell her friends, Phemie and

Musette, of the beautiful dress Rodolphe was making for her. The two young women immediately informed Schaurard and Marcel of their friend's generosity towards his mistress. This information was soon followed by hints that they should follow the example set by the poet.

"If I continue like this," Musette told Marcel stroking his moustache, "I shall be forced to go out in trousers."

"You can get them for eleven francs in any shop," replied Marcel.

And what about me?" said Phemie, "my dressing gown is in rags."

Schaurard drew three sous out of his pocket and handing it to his mistress said:

"Buy some needles and thread. Mend your gown. It will instruct and amuse you."

Nevertheless in a secret meeting Marcel and Schaurard discussed how each was to satisfy the sartorial whims of his mistress.

"These poor women," said Rodolphe, "A mere trifle adorns them, but they must be given it. And art and literature should be used to procure it."

"I'm not pitying myself," said Marcel, "but the fine arts are not very prosperous under the reign of Leon X."

"In fact," replied Rodolphe, "Musette informed me that you leave in the morning and do not return till eight hours later. Are you really working?"

"Yes, Medicis has got me a fine job. I'm painting portraits in a barrack. Eighteen soldiers want their portraits done at six francs each. I hope soon to do the entire regiment. I shall be able to buy Musette new dresses when Medicis pays me. I am dealing with him not his models."

"As for me," said Schaurard indifferently, "I have two hundred sleeping francs."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Rodolphe, "Awaken them!"

"I hope to do so in two or three days," replied Schaurard, "And when I do I am going to indulge some of my own passions. Apart from squandering a little, I want a nankeen coat and a hunting horn."

"But," demanded Marcel and Rodolphe together, "where do you hope to get this large sum from?"

"Now listen to me," said Schaurard assuming a serious air and sitting down between his two friends. "We won't deceive each other. We are all members of the Institute and taxpayers. But the times are hard and the daily loaf difficult to earn. Besides we are not alone. God has created us sensitive and tender beings and we have each chosen a partner to share his

fate."

"Preceded by a herring," interrupted Marcel.

"We observe the strictest economy," continued Schaunard, "but it is difficult when one has an appetite bigger than his plate."

"What's the conclusion to all this...?" demanded Rodolphe.

"This," said Schaunard. "It is very wrong of us to turn up our noses at any opportunity that may present itself, even outside our art, to add a figure to the zero which usually constitutes our earnings!"

"Which of us can you reproach for turning up his nose?" demanded Marcel. "Even though I hope, one day, to be a great painter, have I not condescended to paint the portraits of soldiers to earn a little money? I lose nothing by it."

"And I," said Rodolphe, "haven't I been, for the last fifteen days, composing a didactic poem for a famous dentist who pay me out fifteen sous for a dozen alexandrines? But I'm not ashamed...when one has a lyre...why it must be used! And then Mimi needs shoes."

"In that case," said Schaunard, "I don't think you can blame me if I tell you where I got this money from."

And here is the history of Schaunard's two hundred francs.

About fifteen days back he went to see a music publisher who had promised to find him pupils to take music lessons on the piano.

"Heavens!" said the publisher when he saw Schaunard, "You've come just in time! Only today I was asked about a pianist...an Englishman...he'll pay you well. Are you really good?"

Schaunard knew that if he answered modestly the publisher would suspect him. A modest musician and, above all, a modest pianist, is a rare thing. He replied with confidence and authority.

"Certainly I am. If only I had one lung, long hair and a black coat I would be as famous as the sun and instead of asking for eight hundred francs for the publication of my score, *The Death of the Young Girl*, you would offer me, on your knees, three thousand on a silver plate. My ten fingers have for the past ten years practised the five octaves and I can manipulate the ivories and the diesis excellently."

The person Schaunard had to teach was an Englishman named Mr. Birnin. When he presented himself at his house the musician was first received by a blue coated footman, who presented him to a green coated footman who passed him on to a black coated footman who took him into a room where he was confronted by an islander crouched in a sullen attitude

resembling Hamlet meditating our littleness. Schaunard was about to explain the object of his visit when loud, piercing cries entered the room. The noise came from a parrot seated on a perch on the balcony of the storey below.

"O that beast! That beast!" cried the Englishman jumping up from his chair, "It will be the death of me!"

At the same instant the bird began to talk and Schaunard had never heard a parrot do it so well before. But when he heard it declaim the opening verses from *Theramere*, urged on by a feminine voice, he was more than confounded.

The parrot was the favourite pet of a fashionable actress. She was one of those women, who is known everywhere and whose name is written hastily on the back of supper menus to which they frequently serve as dessert. It is positively dangerous to be seen out with any one of them. If they are pretty it does not matter very much. But their beauty is usually bought by the ounce at the chemists, their minds full of stage plays and their talents lie in the hands of a hired applauder. It is impossible to explain how many distinguished people, with judgment and wealth and a name to preserve, associate with them.

The actress in question was one of the beauties of the day. Her name was Delores and she was supposed to be Spanish, although born in that Parisian Spain to be found in Coquenard street. Although the distance from Coquenard street to Provence is a ten minute walk, it took her more than seven years to do it. Her prosperity must be measured in proportion to her decadence. Thus on the day she fitted her first false teeth she owned one horse, and with the second she came to own more than two. She led a grand life. She lived in the utmost luxury and occasionally gave balls which everybody in Paris attended. Everybody in Paris? That is to say all that crowd of scandalous courtesans, the gamblers and the idle who waste their time and that of others; suspicious looking writers who call themselves men of letters, the libertines and swindlers who seem to appear from nowhere and disappear there again; the whole company of men and women, known and unknown, the daughters of Eve who still tempt their Adams in modern boudoirs, and that mixed crowd to be seen regularly on the first night of every theatrical performance. This was the Paris of Dolores, the mistress of the parrot in question.

This bird, whose oratorical talents were well known in the neighbourhood, had become the terror of the nearest tenants. Exposed on the balcony, he turned his perch into a tribune where, from morn to night, he delivered an interminable discourse. It was an authority on sugar having picked up his

knowledge from some of the men who visited his mistress; he knew the whole repertoire of the actress and could declaim so well that he could very easily double her in the event of her indisposition. Moreover, it was a polyglot, men of many nationalities visiting his mistress, and sometimes uttered blasphemous idioms which would make even a sailor blush. The bird could be amusing and instructive for about ten minutes but, when the conversation was prolonged, it became a veritable torment. The neighbours had several times complained, but the actress insolently ignored them. Two or three tenants, honest family men, indignant at the blasphemies of the parrot, had even given the landlord notice.

The Englishman, into whose apartment we saw Schaunard enter, had patiently endured the parrot for three months. But, one day, he reached the limit of his patient endurance. Donning the pompous costume in which he had long ago been presented to Queen Victoria, he walked into the actress' apartment.

When Delores saw him she at first mistook him for Hoffmann disguised as Lord Spleen and, wanting to welcome a comrade, she offered him breakfast. The Englishman replied gravely in French which a Spanish refugee had taught him in twenty-five lessons.

"I will accept your invitation on condition we eat that bird..." he said waving a hand towards the parrot which, having already scented the presence of an islander, started humming God Save the King.

Delores felt that the Englishman, her neighbour, had come to make fun of her, and turned red with anger.

"There is a price on that bird's head and I'll gladly pay it," said the islander.

Delores angrily replied that she was going to keep her bird and would not see it pass into another's hands.

"Oh I don't want it in my hands!" replied the Englishman, "But under my feet!" And he lifted up one of his legs.

Delores was shaking with indignation and was about to give vent to her anger when she suddenly saw a ring, probably worth about two thousand five hundred francs, on the Englishman's finger. This discovery immediately cooled her. She felt that it was perhaps a little imprudent to lose one's temper with a man who carried so much money on his little finger.

"Well," she said, "if this poor bird annoys you I'll put him at the back. You won't hear him then..."

The Englishman limited himself to making a gesture of satisfaction.

"However," he said showing his boot, "I would have preferred..."

"Have no fear," said Delores, "I shall put him in a place where it would be impossible for him to trouble my lord."

"I'm not a lord...I'm only an esquire."

But when Mr. Birnin was about to depart, having wished her with a slight incline of the head, Delores, who wanted to please him all she could, grabbed a small packet on the table and said:

"I am giving a...benefit performance this evening. May I offer you some tickets? The prices has been slightly raised."

She placed about twelve box tickets in the islander's hands.

"After I've been so pleasant to him," she thought, "he can't possibly refuse. He's an aristocrat. He may yet see me in my rose gown, who knows? We're neighbours after all! That diamond is the advance guard of at least a million. But he's rather ugly. Anyway I'll be able to get to London without being sea sick."

The Englishman asked the price of the tickets.

"The boxes are 60 francs each. I've given you ten...but please don't be in such a hurry," she added when she saw the Englishman drawing out his purse. "I hope you'll pay me a visit now and again. We're neighbours, you know."

"We shall see..." He took out a thousand franc note and placed it on the table and slipped the tickets into his pocket.

"I must return..." began Delores opening a drawer where she kept her money.

No! No!" interrupted the Englishman. "Have a drink on it!"

Delores was left thunderstruck.

"Have a drink on it!" she exclaimed to herself when she was alone, "What a fool! I must return his change."

But her neighbour's coarseness had only irritated the epidermis of her *amour-propre*. She calmed down on reflection. After all, she thought, twenty louis was a good bonus and she had formerly endured worse insults for less money.

"No need to be so proud!" she said, "Nobody saw me take it and my laundress has to be paid today. And he may have meant it as compliment!"

And Delores gaily put the twenty louis away.

But later in the evening she returned home furious. Mr. Birnin had not used his tickets and the ten boxes had remained empty. To make matters worse she could read obvious joy on the faces of some of her actress 'friends.' She had even heard one of them, pointing to the unoccupied boxes, exclaim:

"Poor Delores! Only the front row is full!"

"Yes, the boxes are empty," said another.

"Poor thing! When her name appears on the poster it has

the effect of a pneumatic machine!"

"And she raised the prices!"

"A fine benefit performance. I bet the money is at the bottom of her stocking."

"And what about her red velvet costume...?"

"She looks like a lobster!"

"What did you get on your last benefit?"

"It was crowded out, my dear, on the very first day. But I only got six francs. My modiste took the rest. If I weren't frightened of chilblain I'd go to Saint Petersburg."

"What! You want to go to Russia at the age of thirty?"

"Why not! When is your benefit?"

"In fifteen days. I've already gathered a hundred crowns..."

"Listen! There's the orchestra."

"Yes Delores is singing."

Delores, her face as red as her costume, was trilling out a song. As she terminated it on a high note two bouquets fell at her feet thrown by two actress friends of hers who advanced to the edge of their box shouting:

"Bravo Delores!"

One can easily picture the actress' fury. And when she returned home, although it was past midnight, she awoke Coco, which immediately disturbed the honest Mr. Birnin sleeping peacefully over the faithful promise.

From that night war was declared between the actress and the Englishman; war to the knife, without respite or truce, in which the adversaries spared no cost. The parrot, in consequence, made a deep study of the English language and every day hurled insults, in his highest falsetto, at his neighbour. It was, indeed, something intolerable. Delores herself had to endure it but there was always the hope that Mr. Birnin would one day relent. The islander, on the other hand, invented all sorts of things to avenge himself. At first he established a drum school in his own apartments, but the police intervened. But Mr. Birnin was an ingenious Englishman. He started a shooting gallery and over fifty rounds a day were fired by his servants. The police were forced to intervene again and pointed out a clause in the municipal code which forbade the use of firearms inside houses. The shooting was stopped. Eight days later, however, Delores could hear water being splashed in the Englishman's room. The landlord saw Mr. Birnin who was in a chaos. The paper peeled off the walls and the door knobs were already turning rusty. The bath was being mixed in the proportion of a hundredth part of water to a fiftieth part of salt. It was a real ocean. It lacked nothing, not even fish, which descended

from an opening in the wainscot. Mr. Birnin bathed daily. After some time the ocean began to make its presence felt in the house and Delores herself had half an inch of water in her bedroom.

The landlord was furious and demanded compensation for his destroyed furniture and room.

"Haven't I a right to bathe?" demanded the Englishman.

"No, Sir."

"Very well, I have no right," said the Englishman full of respect for the laws of the country in which he lived. "It's a great loss."

That same evening orders were given for the ocean to be drained. It was none too soon. A bank of oysters had already appeared on the floor.

But Mr. Birnin had not given up the war. He looked for some other legal means by which to continue it. All the idlers of Paris were delighted over this singular war because news of it had been spread in theatre foyers and other public places. Delores was determined to emerge triumphant. She had taken bets on it.

It was now that Mr. Birnin thought of the piano. It was a brilliant idea. The most disagreeable of instruments was being pitted against the most disagreeable of birds. No sooner did the thought strike him than he put it into execution. He hired a piano and asked for a pianist. The pianist, it may be recalled, was to be our own friend Schaunard. The Englishman intimately revealed his grievances against the neighbouring parrot and all that he had already tried out to reach a settlement with the actress.

"But m'lord," said Schaunard, "there is a way out. Parsley. All chemists agree that parsley is like prussic acid to these birds. Chop up some and throw it near Coco's cage. It will die as if it had been invited to dinner by Pope Alexander VI."

"I've thought of that...but the bird is closely guarded," replied the Englishman. "No, the piano is the best."

Schaunard looked at the Englishman for an explanation.

"This is my plan," he said. "The actress and her bird sleep till almost midday. Follow me closely...Well I want to disturb that sleep. The law of this country authorises me to play music from morning till evening. D'you see my idea?"

"But," said Schaunard, "the actress won't find it at all disturbing if I play the piano all day, and free too! I'm a good musician, and if only I had one lung..."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the Englishman, "I don't want you to play good music. I only want you to thump on the keys."

Like this," he added playing a scale. "And always, always the same thing, pitilessly. It will drive her mad. I want you to start now. I'll pay you well for it."

"And that," said Schaunard who had been relating the above details, "that is the work I've been doing for the last fifteen days. The same scale from five in the morning till evening. It's not exactly serious art. But when the Englishman pays you two hundred francs what would you do? It would be suicidal to refuse such a windfall. I shall draw my salary in a few days' time."

This was followed by an intimate discussion and exchange of confidences among the three friends. They arrived at the decision that their resources should be placed in a common pool to buy their mistress the spring dresses they had coveted for so long. Moreover, they decided that, whoever got his money first, should wait until the others had received theirs, so that Musette, Mimi and Phémie could buy their 'new skins,' as Schaunard called it, at the same time.

Two or three days after this secret meeting, Rodolphe held the lead. His poem had been paid for. He obtained eighty francs. The day after Marcel had drawn eighteen portraits of corporals at six francs each. Both Rodolphe and Marcel found it extremely difficult to keep silent about the money.

"I feel I'm oozing with gold," said the poet.

"Like me," replied Marcel. "If Schaunard delays any longer it will be impossible for me to continue in the role of an anonymous Croesus."

But the very next day the Bohemians saw Schaunard arrive splendidly attired in a new yellow Nankeen coat.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Phémie fascinated by her lover's changed appearance, "Where did you find that coat?"

"Among my old clothes," replied the musician gesticulating to his two friends to follow him. "I've got it," he told them when they were alone, "Here it is," and he spread out a handful of gold.

"Good!" cried Marcel, "On our way! Let's pillage the shops! Gosh! is Musette going to be happy!"

"And Mimi too!" added Rodolphe, "Aren't you coming Schaunard?"

"I want to think it over," replied the musician. "By adorning these women with a lot of frippery we are doing a foolish thing. Reflect for a moment. When they resemble the illustrations in *The Rainbow* don't you think those splendours would exercise a deplorable influence on their characters? It's not that I hesitate to sacrifice forty or fifty francs for Phémie's sake. But I'm afraid. When she has a new hat she perhaps won't

want to recognise me! What do you think philosopher?" he added turning to Colline, who had just entered the room.

"Ingratitude is the daughter of kindness," replied the philosopher.

"On the other hand," continued Schaunard, "What do you think you'll look like escorting your mistresses in your torn suits? You'll look like their servants! I'm not talking about myself because, thank God, I'm now presentable."

Nevertheless, in spite of Schaunard's opposition, it was decided, for the benefit of their women, to strip all the shops on the following day.

The next morning, at the very hour we saw Mimi, at the commencement of this chapter, awake to find Rodolphe absent, the poet and his two friends were climbing the stairs accompanied by the errand boy of The Two Magots. Schaunard, who had bought his horn, marched in front playing the overture from *The Caravan*.

Musette and Mimi, who lived on the same landing, on hearing of new dresses and hats, arrived with the rapidity of an avalanche. Seeing all the sartorial riches spread out before them the three women went mad with joy. Musette threw her arms round Marcel's neck and, holding a green shoe in each hand, clasped one against the other like cymbals. Mimi, hilarious with excitement, jumped about like a goat and even tumbled on the floor. Phémie burst out sobbing and, looking at Schaunard, could only exclaim:

"Oh! My Alexander! My Alexander!"

"There is no danger in her refusing the presents of Artaxerxes," murmured the philosopher Colline.

When the first flush of excitement had passed, and the clothes distributed, Rodolphe told the ladies they would have to leave the sewing till later.

"We're going to the country," he said.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Musette, "But it won't be the first time I shall sew and trim a dress in one day. Besides we have tonight. We'll be ready, won't we?"

"We'll be ready!" cried Mimi and Phémie together.

They immediately set to work and for the next hours they laid aside neither scissors nor needle.

The next morning was the first of May. The bells of Pagues had for some days announced the arrival of spring. It had indeed arrived. Everywhere its eager and joyous presence could be felt. As the German ballad says, it appeared like the May-pole which the lover sets up under the window of his sweetheart. It painted the sky blue, the trees green and all living things in beautiful colours. It awoke the sun in its foggy bed pillowed on

the white clouds by shouting: "It's time to wake! I'm here! Quickly to work! Put on your beautiful coat and climb your balcony and announce my arrival."

The sun awoke, and striding superb and proud as a courtier across the sky, commenced its work. The swallows returned from their eastern pilgrimage and filled the air with their soaring, the hawthorn whitened the thickets, the violet lay embalmed in the grass, and the birds emerged from their nests with a book of songs under their wings. It was spring, the genuine spring of poets and lovers and not the spring of Matthieu Laensberg, with a red nose and numbed fingers still holding the poor before their fireplace where the last pieces of the last log has burnt out. The warm winds rush through the translucent air and scatter the first sweet odours from the surrounding country. The days of the sun, warm and clear, strike on the window panes. To the sick it says: "Open, I am health!" And to the young girl standing before her mirror, that first and most innocent love, it says: "Open, pretty girl, that I may light up your beauty! I am the harbinger of fine weather. You can now wear your cotton dress and straw hat and your smart laced shoes. The groves are filled with beautiful flowers and all nature lives again. Good morning, pretty girl!"

As the Angelus rang from a neighbouring church the three hard-working bouquets, who had hardly slept, were already standing before their mirrors giving their new dresses a last hurried glance. All three of them looked charming, were similarly dressed, and wore on their faces that same look of satisfaction which is the result of the realisation of their greatest desires.

Musette in particular was ravishing.

"I've never been so happy," she told Marcel. "God seems to have compressed all happiness into this one hour. I'm afraid nothing may remain!" And she gaily hugged Marcel.

And for Phémie only one thing seemed to disturb her.

"I love the trees and the birds," she said, "but in the country we meet nobody and my pretty new hat and beautiful dress won't be seen. Can't we go to the boulevards?"

At eight o'clock in the morning the whole street was in a flutter. Schaunard blew a fanfare on his horn as a signal for their departure. All the neighbours rushed to their window to watch the Bohemians pass. Colline, who also joined them, brought up the rear carrying the ladies' umbrellas. An hour later the entire happy band was dispersed over the field of Fontenay-aux-Roses.

When they returned home late that evening Colline who, during the day had fulfilled the functions of a treasurer, declared that he had forgotten to spend six francs and placed the money

on the table.

"What shall we do with it?" asked Marcel.

"Should we pay the rent?" suggested Schaunard.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### FRANCINE'S MUFF

AMONG the true Bohemians I once knew one named Jacques D... He was a sculptor and showed promise of becoming a great artist one day. But poverty gave him no time to accomplish the promise. He died in March 1844 at Saint Louis hospital, Saint-Victoire ward, bed number 14.

I met Jacques in hospital where I myself had been confined by a long illness. Jacques had, as I have said, genius, but was quite unaware of it. During the two months I knew him, when he seemed almost in the arms of death, I did not once hear him complain or give himself up to those lamentations which make unappreciated artists ridiculous. He died without fuss, with only those horrible grimaces of agony on his face. His death, I think, is one of the most atrocious scenes I have ever witnessed in the caravansary of human misery. His father, informed of the event, had come to claim the body and haggled for hours over the thirty-six francs demanded by the authorities. He had haggled, too, over the church service and after persistent arguments they returned him six francs. When the corpse was placed on the bier an attendant lifted up the sheet and asked one of the dead man's friends to buy a 'shroud. The poor devil, who did not have a sou, went to find Jacques' father, who returned in a furious anger and asked if they had not done annoying him.

The nurse, who took part in this monstrous debate, glanced at the corpse and uttered these tender and naive words:

"Poor boy! You can't bury him like that. He's so cold. Buy him at least a shirt so that he may not arrive naked before God."

The father gave the friend five francs for a shirt but advised him to go to an old clothes dealer on Grange-aux-Belles street.

"It will be less expensive," he added. This cruel indifference on the part of Jacques' father was later explained to me. He was furious with his son for having taken up art and his anger could not be appeased even before his coffin.

But all this you must think is very far from Francine and her muff. I shall be dealing with them. Francine was the first and only mistress of Jacques who was only twenty-three when he died. Jacques himself related this affair to me when he was

in bed 14 and I in bed 16 of the Saint-Victoire ward, a horrible place to die in.

Wait Reader! Before I commence this tale, which would really be a beautiful one if I could relate it as it was told me by my friend Jacques, let me smoke the old clay pipe which he gave me. That night, when the attendant was asleep, Jacques took out his pipe and tobacco. Everybody in the ward was annoyed because they could not sleep and suffered.

"Just one or two puffs," he said to me, "and I shall put it aside so that Sister Saint-Genevieve won't smell the smoke when she comes on her rounds." O good sister Genevieve! When we see you so sweetly walking under the dark arch, draped in your white dress which falls in such beautiful folds, we could almost worship you! You are the Beatrice in this hell, good sister! If sweetness were the only consolation you could offer then we want to be consoled by you. If my friend Jacques were not dead he would have sculptured a small virgin for your cell, sweet sister Genevieve!

A Reader—"What about the muff? I haven't seen it yet."

Another Reader—"And Francine? Where is she?"

First Reader—"This isn't very happy story!"

Second Reader—"We'll wait for the end."

I beg your pardon, gentlemen, but it is Jacques' pipe which has led me to make these digressions. But I am not compelled always to make you laugh. Every day is not a happy day in Bohemia.

Jacques and Francine met each other in a house on La Tour d'Auvergne street into which they had moved on the same day in the month of April. Almost eight days passed before those merely neighbourly relations, into which those who live on the same landing are ordinarily forced, were broached. Nevertheless, without having exchanged a single word, they already knew each other. Francine knew that her neighbour was a poor devil of an artist, and Jacques was given to understand that his neighbour was a small dressmaker who had run away from home to escape the persecutions of a step-mother. Both of the performed miracles, as they say, in making both ends meet. But as Francine had never known much pleasure she did not envy it. This is how they broke down the partition-wall of mere neighbours.

One evening in the month of April Jacques returned home tired and hungry and profoundly sad, that vague sadness which has not precise cause but overwhelms you at any hour, a species of apoplexy of the heart to which all those who live solitary

Wives are particularly subject. Jacques, who felt he was being suffocated in his small cell, opened his window for some fresh air. The evening was beautiful and the setting sun, unfolded its melancholy enchantments on the hills of Montmartre. Jacques stood pensively at his window listening, in the calm of the evening, to the winged chorus of spring harmonies, which only increased his sadness. A raven passed cawing putting him in mind of the time when ravens fed Elijah, the saintly hermit, with bread, and reflected that ravens were no longer so charitable. Then, unable to bear it any longer, he closed the window, drew the curtains and, as he had no oil for his lamp, lit a *cierge*. Feeling more and more sad he lit his pipe.

"Fortunately there's enough tobacco to hide my pistol," he murmured puffing at his pipe.

My friend Jacques must have been very sad that evening if he wanted to hide his pistol. It was his last resource and he always succeeded. Jacques smoked his pipe, on which he spread a few drops of laudanum, till the clouds of smoke were so thick that it hid everything in his small room and above all the pistol which hung on the wall. It took altogether about twelve pipes. When the pistol was entirely hidden the combined effect of the smoke and the laudanum was to put Jacques to sleep and his sadness was abandoned on the threshold of his dreams.

But this evening, although he had used all his tobacco and the pistol was perfectly hidden, Jacques was still awake and bitterly sad. On the other hand, when Francine returned, she was extremely gay and like Jacques' sadness, her gaiety had no cause. It was just one of those happy moments which God flings down from heaven into the hearts of the good. Francine, then, was in a happy mood and sang as she climbed up the stairs. But when she opened her door a gust of wind from the open window suddenly extinguished her candle.

"How annoying!" she exclaimed, "I'll have to climb up and down six storeys."

But when she saw a light at Jacques' door laziness coupled with curiosity counselled her to ask the artist. It is a service which neighbours daily render each other, she thought, and should not compromise her. She knocked timidly twice on Jacques' door. A little surprised at such a late visit he opened the door. But she had hardly taken a step into the room when the smoke suffocated her and before she had even uttered a word, she fell swooning into a chair dropping her candle and key on the floor. It was midnight and everybody in the building was asleep. Jacques could not decide whether he should call for help; he was afraid he might compromise his neighbour.

He opened the window to let in some fresh air and after having thrown a few drops of water on her face he saw the young girl open her eyes and slowly awake. In five minutes she had completely regained consciousness. She explained why she had come and asked to be excused for what had happened.

"I'd better get back to my room now," she said.

When she opened the door not only did she discover that she had forgotten to light her candle but that she had not taken her key.

"I'm still so stunned," she said lighting her candle at Jacques'ierge, "that I'm leaving without taking what I came for!"

But at that same moment the gusts of wind both from the open window and the door suddenly extinguished theierge and the two young people found themselves in darkness.

"What a nuisance!" said Francine, "Please light the candle, I want to find my key."

"Certainly," replied Jacques groping for matches in his pockets.

He found them easily enough but a singular thought crossed his mind. He put the matches back into his pocket.

"Good Lord!" he said, "I haven't a single match! I used the last when I came in."

"Oh Dear!" exclaimed Francine, "I can find my way about my room without a candle, but I want my key. Please help me look for it. It must be on the floor."

"Let's look," replied Jacques.

And both of them searched for the lost object in the darkness. Guided by the same purpose, their hands, groping in the same spot, met about ten times in every minute. They were both of them clumsy and did not find the key.

"The moon shines right into my room. It's behind a cloud at present. Wait a little while."

They stopped the search to wait for the moon. While they waited they chatted. Now a chat in the dark, in a small room on a spring night; a chat which opens by being frivolous and insignificant and slowly becomes more and more intimate, you know where that leads...The words gradually became confused and reticent, spoken in a low voice, and alternated by heavy sighs...Their hands met to complete the thought which climbs from the heart to the lips...Well, young readers, search for the conclusion in your own memories!

At last the moon appeared and flooded the whole room. Francine awoke as from a dream and uttered a small cry.

"What's the matter?" asked Jacques putting his arms round her waist.

"Nothing!" murmured Francine, "I thought I heard someone knock."

She kicked her key under a chair. She did not want to find it now.

First Reader—"I certainly wouldn't allow my daughter to read this book!"

Second Reader—"Till now I haven't seen a hair of Francine's muff. I don't even know what she looks like, a blonde or a brunette."

Patience, dear readers, patience! I have promised you a muff and you shall have it, as Jacques himself told poor Francine, blonde and gay, an uncommon combination. Till her twentieth year she had completely ignored love, but a vague presentiment of her fast approaching end advised her to delay no longer if she desired the experience.

She met Jacques and liked him. Their affair altogether lasted for six months, starting in spring and terminating in autumn. Francine was a consumptive. She knew it and so did Jacques. Fifteen days after meeting the young girl he discovered it from one of his friends who was a doctor.

"She will go with the yellow leaves," he said. Francine overheard the doctor and tackled Jacques.

"What's this about yellow leaves? We are in summer and the leaves are green. Let's make the best of it, my dear...When I am ready to go you can take me in your arms and kiss me and hold me back. I am obedient, you know, and I will wait."

And for nearly six months this charming girl endured a miserable Bohemian life with a song and a smile on her lips. Jacques combed all Paris to get the doctor's prescription made up. But Francine did not want to hear him even speak of it and threw the medicines out of the window. At night, when she got a fit of coughing, she would run out of the room so that he may not hear her.

One day when they were out in the country Jacques saw a tree whose leaves had turned yellow. He glanced sadly at Francine who walked slowly and a little dreamily beside him. She saw him turn pale and guessed why.

"You're a beast!" she said embracing him. "We're only in June...three more months for October. We must be longer together and if I feel worse we can live in a fir forest where the leaves are always green."

In the month of October Francine was forced to remain in bed. Jacques looked after her...The small room in which they lived was situated at the top of the building which overlooked

a courtyard where a tree daily shed its yellow leaves. Jacques put a curtain across the window so that Francine may not see it. But every day she begged him to draw the curtain aside.

"O my dear," she said, "I'll give you a hundred more kisses than the leaves it sheds...I'm getting better...I'll be out soon. But as it'll be cold and I don't want my hands to turn red buy me a muff." And during her illness the muff was her only thought.

On the eve of All Saints' day, when she saw Jacques looking more desolate than ever, she thought she would give him courage and hope. To prove that she felt better she got out of bed. But just at that moment the doctor arrived and made her get back immediately.

"Jacques," the doctor whispered into the artist's ear, "be brave! Everything is over, Francine is going to die."

Jacques burst into tears.

"Give her all she asks for," continued the doctor, "there's no hope left."

Francine guessed what the doctor had told her lover.

"Don't listen to him," she cried holding out her arms towards Jacques. "Don't listen to him, he's lying! We'll go out together tomorrow...it's All Saints' day. It will be cold, go and buy me my muff now...please."

Jacques left the room with a friend and the doctor remained with Francine.

"I'm going to die, I know it!" she told the doctor when they were alone, "but before I die find me something to give me strength for one night, I beg of you, just one more night and if I should die after that when God calls me..."

As the doctor was doing his best to console her a gust of wind blew in a yellow leaf and deposited it in her bed. Francine opened the curtain and saw the tree in the courtyard completely bare.

"It's the last," she said putting the leaf under her pillow.

"You will die tomorrow," the doctor told her, "you have one more night to yourself."

"How lovely!" said the young girl, "...a winter night too... it will be long."

Jacques returned carrying a muff.

"It's very pretty," said Francine, "I'll wear it tomorrow."

She spent the night with Jacques.

The next day, All Saints' day, at about midday, her whole body trembled with pain.

"My hands are cold," she murmured, "give me my muff." And she plunged her poor hands into the skin...

"It's the end," the doctor told Jacques. Jacques went up

to Francine and kissed her on the lips. To the last moment she clung to the muff and would not let them take it away.

"No, no..." she cried, "let me keep it. It's winter...and cold. Poor Jacques...Poor Jacques...what are you going to do? O God!"

The next day Jacques was alone.

First Reader—"I said this wouldn't be a happy story."

What do you expect, reader? We cannot always laugh.

Francine died on All Saints' morning. Two men stood near her bed. One, who stood erect, was the doctor; the other, kneeling down and kissing the hands of the girl, hoping with a desperate kiss to awake her, was Jacques. For the six hours he had been plunged in the deepest sorrow. Suddenly an organ outside the window began to play. It played the tune Francine was accustomed to sing every morning when she awoke. One of those desperate hopes which only take birth in moments of deep sorrow crossed Jacques' mind. He withdrew a month into the past when Francine was only dying. He forgot the present and imagined a moment when the girl was only asleep and would soon wake to sing her usual motutinal song. But the organ still continued to play and soon brought Jacques back to reality. Francine's mouth was eternally closed to songs and time was gradually effacing even the smile which was on her lips when she died...

"Be brave, Jacques!" said the doctor who was the artist's friend.

Jacques rose and stared at the doctor.

"It's all over isn't it? There's no more hope?"

The doctor drew the curtains round the bed and turned to the artist.

Francine is dead..." he said. "She only waits for us. God knows we have done everything in our power to save her. She was a fine girl, Jacques, who loved you greatly, more perhaps than you yourself loved her. Her love was pure whereas your's was an alloy. Francine is dead...but that isn't all. You must make the necessary arrangements for her burial. We'll do it together and ask one of the neighbours to stay with her during our absence."

Jacques allowed himself to be led by the doctor. He ran about all day to the town hall and the undertakers. Having no money the doctor pawned his watch, a ring and some other articles to pay for the funeral which was to take place the following day. Both of them returned tired late in the evening. A neighbour forced Jacques to eat something.

"Yes," he said, "I must. I'm cold and need strength to work tonight."

Neither the doctor nor the neighbour understood what he meant.

Jacques sat down at the table and ate so hurriedly that he nearly choked himself. He asked for a drink. Carrying the glass to his mouth he dropped it on the floor. The broken glass immediately plunged him again into sorrow. It was a souvenir. The first day that Francine had come to live with him, when she was already ailing, she had felt indisposed and Jacques had given her a small drink of sugar water in the very same glass. He had kept it as a relic of their love. On those rare occasions when the artist earned a little money he would buy her one or two bottles of wine which had been prescribed for her, and it was out of the same glass she would drink the liquor which usually lent her a charming gaiety.

For more than half an hour Jacques, without uttering a word, stared at the splintered pieces of his fragile and dear relic. He felt his own heart would break and tear his breast to pieces. When at last he stirred again he gathered the pieces together and placed them in a drawer. Then he begged the neighbour to get him two candles and have a pail of water sent up by the janitor.

The candles and pail were brought. The two friends found themselves alone.

"What are you doing?" asked the doctor when Jacques, after having poured some water into a small wooden bowl, threw a few handfuls of plaster into it.

"Can't you guess?" said the artist, "I'm going to mould Francine's head.. and as I haven't the courage to do it alone you must stay with me."

Jacques drew the curtains aside and the sheet which covered the dead girl. His heads began to tremble and a suffocating sob rose to his lips.

"Bring me the candles," he told his friend, "and the bowl."

He placed one candle at the head of the bed to light Francine's face and the other at her feet. With a brush dipped in olive oil the artist anointed the eyebrows, the eyelashes and the hair which he arranged as Francine was wont to.

"She won't suffer when the mask is removed," he murmured to himself.

These precautions over, and after having placed the head in a favourable attitude, Jacques started to pour the plaster in successive layers until the mould attained the necessary thickness. In a quarter of an hour the operation was successfully completed.

A strange transformation had come over Francine's face. The plaster had warmed the blood which was not yet entirely cold and a rosy transparency gradually suffused the whiteness of her forehead and cheeks. The eyelids, which opened when the mould was removed, revealed an azure tranquillity in the eyes, and the lips, half open by an incipient smile, about to complete that last adieu which only the heart can hear.

Who can say that understanding ends with unconsciousness? Who can say emotion is extinguished with the last pulsation of the heart which it excites? Could not the soul sometimes remain captive in the body, already in its shroud, and from its prison watch the tears and regrets? Those who leave us have so many reasons to challenge those who remain!

When Jacques was trying to preserve her features through his art, perhaps a thought returned to awake Francine in her endless sleep, who knows? Perhaps she remembered that he whom she was leaving was an artist as well as a lover, that he was both because he could not be one without the other, for to him love was the soul of art and if he loved her it was because she was to him both a woman and a mistress, an embodied ideal. Then again perhaps Francine wanted to leave Jacques a human, living image lit by the graces of youth and the fire of true love. She re-established the objective of art.

And the poor girl was possibly right. Among true artists there exists those singular Pygmalions who want to transform their living Galateas into marble.

Before the serenity of that face, without a trace of pain, nobody would have believed that suffering prefaced her death. It seemed as if Francine still continued her youthful dream of love and happiness.

The doctor, broken by fatigue, slept in a corner.

As for Jacques doubt entered his mind again. His deluded mind still obstinately believed that she whom he had loved so much was waking. And the slow nervous contractions, determined by the recent action of the plaster, at intervals broke the immobility of the body and this simulacrum of life encouraged Jacques in his happy illusion. It lasted until morning when an official came to verify the body and authorise its burial.

While a neighbour dressed Francine Jacques was led into another room where he found some of his friends waiting. The Bohemians, who loved Jacques as a brother, abstained from offering him all those consolations which only irritates sorrow. They silently shook their friend's hand without uttering a single of those difficult and painful words.

"Her death has been a great shock to Jacques," said one of them.

"Yes," replied the painter Lazare, a bizarre personality who had long ago quelled all the early and rebellious passions of youth by the imposition of a stern inflexibility which had killed the man in him. "Yes, but an unhappiness which he voluntarily introduced into his life. Since he came to know Francine, Jacques has changed."

"She made him happy," said another.

"Happy!" exclaimed Lazare, "what do you call happiness? Can you call Jacques' present state happiness? Show him a masterpiece and I'm sure he won't think of his mistress again but begin work on a Titian or Raphael. My mistress is immortal and can never deceive me. She lives in the Louvre and her name is Jacoude."

Lazare was about to continue with his theories on art and life when they perceived that the funeral procession was about to move to the church, where, after some whispered prayers it moved on to the cemetery. Being All Saints' Day an immense crowd thronged the place. Many turned to look at Jacques who walked bareheaded behind the hearse.

"Poor man!" said one, "It must be his mother..."

"His father..." said another.

"His sister..." said yet another.

A lonely poet, who had come there to study the regret and sorrow on the assembled people at this sad feast which was celebrated once a year in a November fog, immediately guessed that he must be following the funeral of his mistress.

Arrived at the grave the Bohemians stood around it bareheaded. Jacques stood on the edge, the doctor holding his arm. The grave diggers were in an urgent hurry and wanted to complete everything quickly.

"There's no speech!" said one of them, "so much the better! Come on, let's get on with it!"

The coffin with the aid of ropes was lowered into the pit, and soon covered with earth. A small wooden cross was planted at the head. In the middle of his sobs the doctor heard Jacques egoistically exclaim:

"O my youth! It is you they are burying!" Jacques belonged to a society known as the Water Drinkers, which was founded in imitation of the famous society on Quatre-Vents street referred to in that beautiful novel *Great Provincial Men*. But there was one great difference between the two. The Water Drinkers exaggerated the principle which they desired to put into practice. This difference is further clarified by the fact that whereas, in Balzac's book, the society achieved its purpose, thereby exemplifying that everything that succeeds is good, the society of Water Drinkers came to be naturally dis-

solved by the death of each of its members without leaving a trace of their existence.

When Jacques met Francine his connection with the society weakened. The necessities of life forced the artist to violate certain rules which were solemnly signed and accepted by the Water Drinkers on the day it was established.

Perpetually perched on the heights of an absurd arrogance these young people permitted no one to break their principles concerning their art. That is to say in spite of their misery no one should yield to necessity. Thus the poet Melchior would never abandon what he called his lyre to write a commercial prospectus or a creed. It was all right for a poet like Rodolphe who knew better than to refuse an opportunity to earn a hundred sous. The painter Lazare would never soil his brushes painting the portrait of a tailor holding a parrot in his hand like our friend Marcel who had once painted such a portrait in exchange for his famous coat surnamed Methuselah. All the time that his ideas were attuned to those of the Water Drinkers Jacques had submitted to the tyranny of the society but once he came to know Francine, who was sick, he felt he could not accept its stern rules. At heart Jacques was loyal and honest. He saw the president of the society, the exclusive Lazare, and informed him that in future he would accept any work which brought him money.

"My dear man," replied Lazare, "your declaration of love for Francine was your resignation as an artist. We shall remain friends if you wish, but we shall no longer be your associates. Do what you like, so far as I am concerned you are no longer a sculptor, but a mason. You will drink wine but we who continue to drink our water, we shall remain artists."

In spite of what Lazare had said Jacques remained an artist. To keep Francine near him he accepted, whenever the opportunity presented itself, lucrative if unartistic work. That was one reason why he worked for so long in the sculptor Romagnis's studio. Clever in execution, ingenious in invention, Jacques was able, without abandoning real art, to establish a great reputation in that species of sculpture which has become one of the principal elements of the luxury trade. But Jacques, like all true artists, was lazy. His ardent and youthful passion was awakened late and with a presentiment of his early end he wanted to spend all the time he could in Francine's arms. Because of this he would often refuse work preferring to dream of the scintillating eyes of his mistress.

When Francine died the sculptor went to see his old friends the Drinkers again. But Lazare dominated the entire society

and its members lived petrified in the egoism of art. Jacques could not get what he wanted from them. They did not understand his deep sorrow and therefore could not proffer him that reason and advice which would have calmed his spirit. Receiving little or no sympathy Jacques preferred to isolate his sadness rather than expose it to discussion. He broke off completely from the Water Drinkers and lived alone.

Five or six days after Francine's burial Jacques found a marble cutter in Montparnasse and struck a bargain with him. In return for two or three months' work as a stone cutter or sculptor the marble cutter was to furnish him with a frame for Francine's tomb and a small piece of white marble. The cutter then received several extra-ordinary orders. He visited Jacques' studio and when he saw a few unfinished works he immediately realised that the chance which threw Jacques his way was a fortunate one. Eight days later Francine's tomb had a frame and the wooden cross was replaced by a stone one with her name engraved on it.

Jacques happily had dealt with an honest man. The cutter knew that a hundred kilogrammes of iron and a three-foot slab of Pyrenees marble was no adequate payment for the three months that Jacques, whose talent had earned for him several thousand crowns, had worked for him. He offered the artist a share in his business, but Jacques refused. He would be restricted to a few varieties of subject and treatment and that was repugnant to his naturally inventive nature. Besides he had obtained what he wanted, a piece of marble out of which he was going to create a masterpiece for Francine's tomb.

With the spring Jacques' position improved. His friend the doctor introduced him to a wealthy foreigner who was settling in Paris and building a magnificent mansion in one of the best quarters. Several famous artists were being employed to make their contribution towards the luxury of this small palace. Jacques was asked to design a fireplace for the drawing room. I saw Jacques' design. It was a charming thing. The whole poem of winter was depicted on marble. Jacques' studio being too small to work in he demanded and obtained an untenanted room in the mansion itself. He was even advanced a large sum of money. Jacques immediately returned the money which his friend the doctor had lent him when Francine died. He went to the cemetery to cover Francine's grave with a field of flowers. But spring had been there before him. A thousand flowers had sprung up over the grass. The artist had not the courage to pull them up; he felt they must contain a part of his mistress. When the gardener asked him what he was going to do with the roses and pansies he had brought he ordered them

to be placed on the recent tomb of some poor person which had no enclosure and only a piece of stick at the head with a crown of paper flowers.

When Jacques left the cemetery he was a different being. He stared with a curious joy at the spring sun, the same beautiful sun which had gilded Francine's hair when she ran about the countryside mowing down the nearest flowers with her white hands. A swarm of happy emotions entered Jacques' heart. Passing a small café on the boulevard he recalled how one day, having been surprised by a storm, he had entered it with Francine and had dined there. Jacques entered it now and asked to be served at the same table. They gave him dessert in a plate decorated with vignettes. He immediately recognised the plate and remembered how Francine had spent half an hour trying to solve the rebus painted on it. He also remembered a song which Francine had sung made happy by some inexpensive violet wine which contained more gaiety than grapes. But this succession of happy memories awakened his love without awakening his sorrow. Like all poets and dreamers he was superstitious and imagined that it was Francine, who must have heard him walk near her grave, who was responsible for this happy train of memories. He did not want to dampen them with a tear. He left the café walking briskly, his head high, his eyes alight, his heart beating and the shadow of a smile on his lips. He hummed to himself a refrain from Francine's song:

Love prowls in my quarter  
And my door must be open.

This refrain, in Jacques' mouth, was still a memory but it soon became a song and perhaps for the first time he realised that he was passing through that transition first from sadness to melancholy and then to forgetfulness. It was the eternal and just law of change at work whatever else he may have desired.

The flowers which Jacques had seen growing on Francine's grave had sent strength to the flowering youth in his heart and vague memories of his old love awakened aspirations for a new one. Moreover Jacques belonged to that race of artists and poets who turn love into an instrument of art and poetry and whose minds can only act through the propelling force of the heart. With Jacques invention was really the daughter of emotion. A small part of himself could be found in everything he did. He saw that his memories alone could no longer suffice him. Just as the millstone stops when the grain is finished his heart would give itself up to false emotion. Work no longer

had any charms for him. Invention, formerly feverish and spontaneous, would now reach him only after much effort and patience. Jacques was discontented and envied the life of his old friends the Water Drinkers.

He looked for something to distract him, plunged into pleasure and started many new affairs. He frequently saw the poet, Rodolphe, whom he had met in a café, and a common sympathy bound their friendship. He related his troubles to him. It did not take Rodolphe long to discover the reason.

"My friend," said the poet, "I know that..." tapping his heart, "Be quick, the fire there must be relighted. Start some small affair without delay and your ideas will return."

"I loved Francine," replied Jacques.

"And you can love her again. You can kiss her on another's lips."

"If only I could find a woman who resembles her!" said Jacques.

And still dreaming of his mistress he left Rodolphe.

Six weeks later Jacques had regained his spirits relighted by the sweet glances of a pretty girl named Marie who resembled Francine a little. Marie was a beautiful girl about eighteen years of age. Her liaison with Jacques was born under the light of a moon in a garden within ear shot of a violin, a double-bass and clarinet which whistled like a blackbird. Jacques met her one evening when he was gravely walking around the hall in a ballroom. Seeing him pass stiff in his eternal black coat buttoned to the neck, some of the noisy and pretty ladies whispered among themselves:

"What is this undertaker doing here? Is there anyone to be buried?"

Jacques kept aloof, sad and gloomy with his thoughts which the orchestra tended to increase by playing a quadrille which seemed to him as sad as a hymn. It was while he was in the middle of this reverie that he saw Marie staring at him from a corner and laughing foolishly at his grave face. Jacques raised his eyes and discovered that the laughter came from under a rose coloured hat three feet away from him. He approached the young girl and spoke to her. She responded. He offered her his arm for a walk around the garden and she accepted. He told her he found her as pretty as an angel. She made him repeat it twice. He plucked her some apples which she crunched with delight accompanied by that loud laughter which seemed to be the ritornello of her constant gaiety. Jacques thought of the Bible and felt that one should never despair of any woman, still less if she loved apples. He walked around the garden for a

second time with the rose coloured hat and accompanied her home.

But Jacques had not forgotten Francine. Following Rodolphe's advice he kissed her every day on Marie's lips, and worked secretly on the figure he wanted to place on her tomb.

One day when he received some money he bought Marie a black dress. The girl was very happy but thought that black was not a very gay colour for summer. Jacques told her he loved black and would please him immensely if she wore her black dress every day. Marie obeyed him.

One day Jacques told the young girl:

"Come early tomorrow. We'll go into the country."

"How lovely!" Marie said, "I'll have a surprise for you, you'll see."

Marie spent that night completing a new dress she had bought with her savings, a pretty rose coloured dress. She arrived the next morning at Jacques' studio in her new outfit.

The artist received her coldly, almost cruelly.

"And I thought I'd please you!" said Marie who could not understand Jacques' indifference.

"We won't go," he said. "You can if you like, but I have some work."

Marie left with a heavy heart. On the way home she met a young man who knew Jacques' history and who had formerly paid court to her.

"You're not in mourning?" he asked her.

"In mourning? Why?"

"Why! Don't you know? Everyone does...that black dress Jacques gave you..."

"Yes?"

"It was a mourning dress. Jacques made you mourn for his Francine."

Jacques did not see Marie again.

This rupture made him unhappy. The sad days returned again. He could not work and was plunged into such a sorrowful mood that, perhaps knowing what was going to happen, he begged the doctor to get him admitted into hospital. The doctor realised that that would not be difficult. Jacques was on his way to join Francine.

He was admitted into the Saint-Louis hospital.

As he was still able to move about he asked the head of the hospital to give him a small unused room where he collected a stool, some tools and some clay. For the first fifteen days he worked at the figure which was destined for Francine's tomb. It was a large angel with open wings. This figure, which was none other than the portrait of Francine, was never entirely

completed because soon Jacques was unable to climb the staircase and later he was unable to leave his bed.

One day the surgeon's record fell into his hands and, from the remedies ordered for him, he knew that he was lost. He wrote to his family, and asked to see Sister Sainte-Genevieve who had taken such good care of him.

"Sister," he said, "in the room which you lent me there is a small plaster statue. It represents an angel and was destined for a tomb...but I haven't the time to finish it in marble. You can take it for the society's chapel."

Jacques died a few days later. As the funeral took place on the opening day of their saloon the Water Drinkers did not attend it.

"Art before everything," said Lazare. As Jacques' family was not very rich he did not have a proper grave and was buried just somewhere.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE WHIMS OF MUSETTE

THE reader must remember that Marcel, the painter, sold his famous picture *Crossing the Red Sea to Medicis*, and that it had become the signboard for a grocer's shop. The morning following the ostentatious dinner the Jew had given, the Bohemians Marcel, Colline, Schaunard and Rodolphe awoke very late. Still dazed by the previous evening's wine, they could not, at first, recall what had happened, and when a neighbouring church rang the midday Angelus they looked at one another with a melancholy smile.

"There's the bell whose pious sounds call humanity to the refectory," said Marcel.

"In fact," said Rodolphe, "it is the solemn hour when all honest people enter their dining-rooms."

"We must first become honest, then," murmured Colline.

"Oh, for some bottles of milk! What has become of the four meals of my infancy?" cried Schaunard, "What has become of them?" he repeated in a dreamy and melancholy voice.

"Say, rather, that at this moment, in Paris, there are at least a hundred thousand chops on the grill!" said Marcel.

"And beef steaks!" added Rodolphe.

Ironically enough, while the four Bohemians discussed the daily problem of breakfast, they could distinctly hear the waiters from the restaurant in the building shouting out the customers' orders.

"Can't they be quiet, the thieves!" said Marcel, "each

word cuts into my stomach like a pickaxe!"

"The wind is blowing north," Colline said, gravely indicating a weathercock on a neighbouring roof, "we can't breakfast today...the elements oppose it."

"But why? demanded Marcel.

"It is a scientific fact..." continued the philosopher, "when the wind blows north it signifies abstinence, just as the wind blowing south ordinarily indicates pleasure and good cheer. In philosophy it is known as information from above."

When Colline was hungry he had a ferocious sense of humour.

Suddenly Schaunard, who had plunged his hand into the abyss which was his pocket, withdrew it with a cry of pain.

"Help! There's something in my coat!" he shouted, trying to extricate his hand from the claws of a living lobster. This cry was immediately followed by another. It came from Marcel who, having unthinkingly put his hand in his pocket, discovered a treasure chest...the five hundred francs that the Jew had paid him for his picture.

"Gentlemen!" said Marcel spreading the crowns, which contained five or six new louis, on the table.

"They are real!" said Colline.

"What a lovely sound!" said Schaunard, tapping the gold pieces.

"And pretty too!" added Rodolphe. "Like pieces of the sun. If I were king I would only have such coins, with my mistress' effigy stamped on them."

"And to think in one country they are as common as stones!" said Schaunard. "At one time the Americans would give you four or five of them for two sous. An old relation of mine once visited America. He was killed by the savages. It was most unjust to the family."

"But," said Marcel, watching the lobster crawling across the room, "where does that come from?"

"Ah, I remember now," replied Schaunard. "When I entered Medicis' kitchen yesterday it accidentally fell into my pocket. I thought I may as well keep him and tame him. I feel so lonely since Phémie left...he'll be a companion to me."

"Gentlemen," said Colline, "please note the change in the weathercock. We can now breakfast."

"I know," said Marcel, taking up a piece of gold, "and this is what we're going to cook with plenty of sauce."

They proceeded leisurely and gravely to the consideration of the menu. Each dish was discussed and the majority vote taken. The omelette soufflé, proposed by Schaunard, was flatly rejected. So were the white wines, against which Marcel built

an argument which greatly relieved his oenophilist friends.

"The first duty of wine is to be red," said the artist, "don't speak to me of your white wines."

"Champagne?" said Schaunard.

"Rubbish! An elegant cider! An epileptic liquorice-water! I would surrender all the caves of d'Epernay and d'Ai for a barrel of burgundy. Besides we haven't grisettes to seduce, nor a vaudeville to do. I vote against champagne."

The menu decided, Schaunard and Colline descended the stairs to the restaurant to order the meal.

"What about a fire?" asked Marcel.

"Why not?" said Rodolphe. "We shall be contravening nothing. In fact the temperature has long invited it. Make a fire. The chimney will be very surprised!"

And he ran out to tell Colline to order some wood to be brought up.

A few minutes later Schaunard and Colline returned followed by a porter carrying a large log of wood.

As Marcel fumbled in his drawer, searching for some old paper with which to light his fire, he accidentally came across a letter whose writing made him wince. Hiding himself from his friends he began to read it. It was a note written by Musette when she was living with him. It was now a year old. It only contained these few words:

MARCEL DEAR,

Don't worry about me, I shall return soon. I have gone for a walk to warm myself. This room is freezing. I have used the remaining legs of the chair, but it was hardly enough to cook an egg. Besides the wind is blowing horribly through the window. I prefer to be out. I want to see the shops. I'm told velvet is being sold at 10 francs a metre. It's incredible! I can't miss seeing that! I shall be back for dinner.

Musette.

"Poor girl!" murmured Marcel, stuffing the letter into his pocket. He remained for a while thoughtful, his head between his hands.

The Bohemians had remained widowers for some time now with the exception of Colline, whose mistress always stayed invisible and anonymous. Phémie herself, that friendly companion of Schaunard, had met a simple soul who offered her his heart, some mahogany furniture and a ring of red hair. However, fifteen days later, her lover asked back for his heart and his furniture because he discovered that she had a ring but a black one. He dared to suspect her of treason. But Phémie

was true to him. Her friends had several times laughed at her red ring and she had dyed it black. Her lover was so happy that he bought her a silk dress, her first.

"Now I can die!" the poor girl exclaimed the day she saw it.

As for Musette she had now become quite famous and Marcel had not seen her for about three or four months. Rodolphe never spoke of Mimi except to himself when he was alone.

"What about the fire?" asked Rodolphe watching the crouched figure of Marcel dreaming in a corner.

"In a second," said the painter lighting the wood which crackled into flame.

While his friends were satisfying their hunger Marcel again isolated himself in a corner, and reread the letter he had accidentally found. Suddenly he remembered the address of a lady who was an intimate friend of his former mistress.

"I know where to find her," he said loud enough to be heard by the others.

"Find what?" asked Rodolphe. "What are you doing?" he added when he saw the artist about to write.

"Nothing. An urgent letter I'd forgotten. I'll join you in a minute."

And he wrote:

MY DEAREST,

I have some money, I've just come in for a fortune. There is a large breakfast simmering, some generous wines and we've even made a fire, my dear, like any bourgeois person. It must be seen, as you once said. Come and spend a little while with us. Rodolphe, Colline and Schaunard are here. You can sing us some songs. Don't be afraid about arriving late. Now that we are at table we shall probably remain there a week! It is such a long time since I heard your laugh! Rodolphe will compose verses to you and we can drink all sorts of things to our former mistresses. With people like us...the last kiss is never the last. Perhaps if it had not been so cold last year you would not have left me! You betrayed me for a log of wood! Perhaps it is just as well. But come down and warm yourself while we still have a fire.

All my love,

MARCEL.

The letter completed, Marcel wrote another to Sidonie, Musette's friend, in which he begged her to deliver the note. He then descended the stairs to give them to the janitor. When he tipped him the janitor saw a glittering piece of gold in the painter's hand. Before delivering the letters he saw the land-

lord, whose rent Marcel had not yet paid.

"Sir," he said, out of breath, "the artist has money! You know the one who laughed in my face when I took him the bill."

"I know," replied the landlord, "he also had the audacity to borrow money from me to pay me my rent. I've given him notice."

"Yes, sir, but he's full of gold today. I saw it shining... he's giving a feast...it's the best time..."

"Yes, yes," said the landlord, "I'll go myself soon."

Sidonie, who was at home when the letter was delivered, immediately sent her maid with it, addressed to Musette.

At the time Musette lived in a charming apartment in Chaussée-d'Autin. When Marcel's letter was delivered to her she had company and was about to leave for dinner.

"It's a miracle!" cried Musette, bursting into hysterical laughter.

"What's the matter?" demanded a handsome youth who looked as stiff as a statue.

"It's an invitation to dinner," replied the young girl, "what do you say?"

"Definitely bad," said the young man.

"But why?" asked Musette.

"What!...Are you thinking of going?"

"I know what I'm going to do...you can do what you like."

"But, my dear, you can go some other day, surely..."

"That's very funny! Some other day! It's an old friend Marcel who has invited me to dinner. Some other day! Dinners are as rare as eclipses in that house!"

"What! And you leave me to see such a person!" said the young man.

"And you tell *me* that!..."

"Whom then? The Grand Turk?"

"I've never known such a thing!..."

"You know I'm different from the others," replied Musette.

"But what would you think of me if I left you? Think, Musette...it's improper. Excuse yourself to this young man..."

"My dear Maurice," said Musette firmly, "you must know me by now...that I'm full of whims...and that no one has ever been able to change my mind."

"Ask for whatever you want..." said Maurice, "...but that! ...there are whims...and whims..."

"Maurice I'm going to Marcel's," she said, putting on her hat. "You can leave me if you like. But he means a lot to me...he's the best man in the world, and the only one I've ever loved. If his heart were gold he'd melt it down to make me

rings. Poor boy!" she added passing him Marcel's letter. "... See, since he has a fire he invites me to warm myself. If only he weren't so lazy and there weren't velvets and silks in the shops! I was very happy with him. He had a knack of making me suffer and it was he who named me Musette for my songs. If I go to him you can be sure I'll return later to you...if you don't want me, you can shut the door in my face."

"You couldn't have said more clearly that you don't love me," replied the young man.

"I cannot talk seriously to you. You keep me as they keep a beautiful horse in a stable...I love you because I love luxury and pleasure. Let's not be sentimental. It would be useless and ridiculous."

"Let me at least go with you..."

"But you won't be amused," replied Musette, "and you'll prevent us from amusing ourselves. And supposing he kisses me?"

"Musette," said Maurice, "have you ever met anyone as accommodating as I'm?"

"One day," replied Musette, "when I was in a carriage with Lord...I saw Marcel and his friend Rodolphe walking. They were both badly dressed, dirty and smoking their pipes. It was three months since I had seen Marcel and my heart seemed to jump into my mouth. I stopped the carriage and in front of everybody spoke for half an hour to Marcel. He offered me some Nanterre cakes and a bouquet of violets. When he left me Lord...wanted me to call them back and invite them to dinner. I kissed him for it. And that is my nature, my dear Maurice. If it doesn't please you, say so now...I shall take my slippers and bonnet with me."

"It's sometimes good to be poor!" exclaimed Viscount Maurice in a voice full of envious sadness.

"Oh no!" replied Musette, "if Marcel were rich I would never have left him."

"Go along then," said the young man shaking her hand, "I see you've got your new dress on. It fits you beautifully."

"Yes, it does," replied Musette, "I must have had a presentiment this morning. Cherio!"

Musette was beautifully attired. Never before had anything more seductively enveloped the poem of her youth and beauty. Musette instinctively possessed a genius for elegance. When she entered the world the first thing she looked for was a mirror to arrange her swaddling-clothes, and before her baptism she had already committed the sin of coquetry. When she was much poorer and humbler, still wearing printed cotton frocks, the simple uniform of a grisette looked ravishing on her, and she

looked beautiful from her small bonnet to her sheepskin shoes. Those pretty girls, the grisettes, who were half-bees, half-grass-hoppers, worked happily throughout the week and only demanded a sunny Sunday on which to fall truly and vulgarly in love and sometimes commit suicide by throwing themselves out of a window. But they are a race who have now disappeared thanks to a new generation of young people, a corrupted and depraved generation, vainglorious, foolish and brutal. Many, for the mere pleasure of inventing literary paradoxes, had laughed at them because their hands had been mutilated by the scars of hard work and because they could not earn enough to buy themselves a plate of almonds. They became more and more foolish and vain and eventually disappeared. The lorettes took their place. The lorettes were a hybrid race, impertinent, of mediocre beauty, half-flesh, half-unguent, whose boudoirs were counters on which they could cut their hearts to pieces as easily as they could slices of roast beef. Most of these girls, who dishonour pleasure and shame gallantry, do not possess the intelligence of the birds whose feathers they wear in their hats. If they should by any chance happen to find, not love, not even a whim, but a vulgar desire, it is usually with some bourgeois mountebank whom the foolish mob surrounds and acclaims at public balls, and whom the newspapers, the flatterers of all that is ridiculous, applaud and entreat. Although Musette was forced to live in such a world she had neither the morals nor the greedy servility of these vile creatures who could only write figures. She was an intelligent and witty girl with the blood of Mansu in her veins. She was essentially a rebel, and could never resist a whim, whatever the consequences may be.

Marcel had really been the only man she had ever loved, at least, he was the only man for whom she had really suffered. It was only her headstrong instincts which attracted her towards "all that glitters and all that rings," for which she had left him. She was twenty years of age, and luxury to her was a question of health. She could do without it for a time, but could never renounce it completely. She was well aware of her own inconstancy and would never consent to padlock her heart with an oath of fidelity. Many young men, whom she herself often appreciated, had fallen ardently in love with her, but with a wisdom full of prevision, she always escaped. The engagements she contracted were simple, frank and artless like the declarations of love of some of Molière peasants. If they liked each other they arrived at an agreement and got married. If she wanted it, she could have on more than ten occasions found security and stability, what people call a future. But she did not believe in a future, and in her whole attitude was the

scepticism of Figaro.

"Tomorrow," she would often say, "is a fatuity of the calendar, a daily pretence that men have invented not to do their work today. Tomorrow may be an earthquake, but today we're on firm ground."

One day a fine young man, with whom she had lived for nearly six months, and who was fervently in love with her, made a serious proposal of marriage. Musette had laughed outrageously in his face.

"What, imprison my liberty by a marriage contract? Never!" she said.

"But I'm terribly afraid of losing you."

"You'd lose me sooner if I were your wife," replied Musette.

"Please don't talk of it again. Besides, I'm not free," she added, thinking no doubt of Marcel.

Thus she spent her youth, her mind tossed about by all the winds of the unforeseen, always making others, and sometimes herself, happy. Viscount Maurice, with whom she was at the moment living, tried hard to understand her indomitable character, drunk with liberty, and it was with impatient jealousy that he waited for her return after having her leave for Marcel's.

"Will she remain there?" the young man asked himself all evening.

"Poor Maurice!" said Musette in her turn. "He finds me a little violent. O well! youth must be moulded!"

Her thoughts then quickly passed to Marcel. She reviewed the few months she had lived with her old lover and wondered what miracle had brought him money. She reread his letter while she walked and could not help feeling a little melancholy. But it lasted for only an instant. She felt, quite rightly, that this was less than ever an occasion for melacholia. Suddenly a strong gust of wind arose.

"Funny," she exclaimed, "but a wind always seems to blow when I'm going to Marcel's!"

And she continued her journey hurriedly as happy as a bird that has built its first nest. She had not gone more than a few feet when it began to snow heavily. Musette looked around to see if she could find a carriage. There was none. As she was in the street where Sidonie lived she thought she would visit her, and wait until the snow had blown over.

Musette found a large gathering in Sidonie's house. A game of lansquenet, which had been started three days ago, was being continued.

"Don't let me disturb you," said Musette, "I shall be leaving almost immediately."

"You got Marcel's letter?" Sidonie whispered in her ear.

"Yes, thanks," replied Musette, "I'm on my way to see him. He's invited me to dinner. Won't you come with me? You'll be amused."

"No, I cannot!" said Sidonie pointing to the card table. "What's my account?"

"Six louis," said the banker in a loud voice.

"Two louis then!" cried Sidonie.

"I'm not proud, I pass," replied the banker who had already passed several times. "King and ace. I'm sunk!" he continued throwing down his cards, "All the kings are dead."

"They won't talk politics, then," said a journalist.

"And the ace is my family's enemy," continued the banker who still returned a king. "Long live the king!" he cried, "Give me two louis Sidonie."

"Put them in your memory," replied Sidonie furious at having lost.

"That's five hundred francs you owe me, my dear," said the banker, "It'll be a thousand soon. I pass."

Sidonie and Musette whispered to each other. The game continued.

Just about the same time the Bohemians sat down to table. Marcel seemed uneasy during the whole meal. Each time he heard a footstep on the stairs he trembled.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Rodolphe, "you're not expecting anyone? Aren't we complete?"

But by the look which the artist gave him the poet knew what was in his mind.

"It's true," he thought, "we aren't complete."

Marcel's wink signified Musette, while Rodolphe's look meant Mimi.

"We need women!" said Schaunard suddenly.

"Heavens!" bawled Colline, "can't you keep your lewd reflections to yourself? One should never speak of love at table, it turns the sauces."

And the four friends continued drinking more ample bumpers, while outside the snow fell incessantly and the fire in the hearth burnt steadily and brilliantly. When Rodolphe was loudly humming a couplet from a song, which the wine had inspired, there were several knocks at the door. At this noise, like a diver who, having touched the bottom of the water with his feet, climbs to the surface, Marcel, numbed by a growing drunkenness, rose precipitately from his chair and ran to open the door.

It was not Musette.

A gentleman stood on the threshold. He held a small piece of paper in his hand. His outward appearance was pleasant,

but his dressing gown was badly cut.

"I find you in a festive mood," he said, looking at the table in the middle of which were the remains of a large leg of mutton.

"The landlord!" said Rodolphe, "Render to him the honours due to him." And he began to sound a salute on his plate with his knife and fork.

Colline offered him a chair.

"Schaunard, a glass of wine for the gentleman," shouted Marcel. "You've come just in time. We were drinking a toast to the house. My friend there, Colline, passed some charming remarks. Now that you're here we'll start again. Colline."

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said the landlord, "I won't disturb you." He unrolled the small piece of paper.

"What is it?" demanded Marcel.

The proprietor, who had swept an inquisitorial glance round the room, saw the gold and the money on the chimney.

"The receipt," he said quickly, "I've already had the honour of presenting it to you."

"Of course," said Marcel, "my faithful memory recalls the incident perfectly. It was on Thursday, the 8th October, at 12-15."

"It now returns with my signature," said the landlord. "If I'm not disturbing you..."

"Sir," said Marcel, "I've wanted to see you myself. I've long wanted to talk to you."

"Most certainly."

"Give me the pleasure of offering you some refreshment first," continued Marcel, handing him a glass of wine. "Sir, you sent me a small piece of paper...with the figure of a woman holding a balance. It was signed by Godard."

"That's my bailiff," said the landlord.

"It was horrible. My friend who knows all languages," continued Marcel waving a hand towards Colline, "my friend wanted to translate the note, which cost ten francs, for me..."

"It was notice to leave," interrupted the landlord, "a precautionary measure...it's the custom."

"A notice, quite," said Marcel, "I want to confer with you concerning this document which I intend to convert into a lease. This house pleases me. The stairs are clean, the street is gay and besides for family reasons, a thousand things attaches me to these walls."

"But the last term has still to be paid," said the landlord.

"It will be paid. That's my intention."

The landlord kept his eyes on the chimney, where the money rested, and he gazed with such fixed and greedy attention that

the coins seemed to move and advance towards him.

"I'm happy to have come at a time when we can settle this small account without any trouble," he said, holding the receipt out to Marcel who, desiring to ward off this fresh attack, re-enacted with his creditor the scene between Don Juan and Dimarche.

"I'm told you have some property in the provinces?" he said.

"Oh very little!" replied the landlord. "A small house in Bourgogne, a farm, small and unproductive...the farmers won't pay...This small amount comes at a marvellous time...sixty francs as you know." He held out the receipt again.

"Sixty, yes," said Marcel, walking towards the chimney. He picked up three gold pieces. "You said sixty," he said, placing the three louis on the table, at some distance from the landlord.

"At last!" murmured the landlord his face lighting up with pleasure. He placed the receipt on the table.

Colline, Schaunard and Rodolphe watched the scene uneasily.

"My dear sir," said Marcel, "since you are a Bourguignon surely you'll stop to say a few words to a compatriot?" And opening a bottle of old macon he poured out a full glass for the landlord.

"Ah! Perfect!" said the landlord, "...I've never drunk anything better before."

"One of my uncles from down there sends me a bottle from time to time."

The landlord rose and extended his hand towards the money when Marcel stopped him again.

"You must have another glass!" he said pouring out another drink and forcing his creditor to clink glasses with him and his three friends. The landlord dared not refuse. He drank again, placed his glass down on the table and stretched his hand towards the money.

"I've got an idea," said Marcel, "I'm a little rich just now, my uncle in Bourgogne has supplemented my pension. I'm afraid I may waste the money. You know youth is foolish... If it won't inconvenience you I'd like to pay another term in advance."

And taking sixty more francs he placed them alongside the others.

"I'll give you a receipt," said the landlord. "I have one in my pocket." He drew out his portfolio. "I'll fill it in and antedate it. A charming tenant," he thought to himself as he guarded the hundred and twenty francs with his eyes.

At such a proposal the three Bohemians, who knew nothing of Marcel's diplomacy, sat stupefied.

"Besides," said Marcel, "the chimney smokes. It's most inconvenient."

"I will attend to it. I'll call in a sweep tomorrow." And having completed filling in the second receipt he placed it beside the first, pushed them both towards Marcel and once again stretched out for the money.

"You cannot imagine how opportunely this money comes. I had to pay for some repairs...I was very embarrassed."

"I regret to have made you wait," said Marcel.

"Oh! I was not...in difficulties...Gentlemen...I have the honour..." And his hand shot forward again.

"Allow me, allow me!" interrupted Marcel. "But we haven't finished yet. You, know the proverb, 'when the wine is opened'..."

He filled the landlord's glass again.

"Is it necessary to drink..."

"It is fair," Marcel answered politely.

This time a wink from Marcel made his plan perfectly clear to the Bohemians.

Soon the landlord began to play with the sloe in the most extraordinary fashion. He balanced himself precariously on the edge of his chair, repeated some broad stories and promised Marcel, who had asked for some more repairs to be done, the most fabulous embellishments to the room.

"Now the heavy artillery!" the artist whispered to Rodolphe, indicating the bottle of rum.

After the first small glass the landlord sang a bawdy song which made even Schaunard blush. After the second small glass he related his conjugal misfortunes and since his wife's name was Helen, he compared himself to Menelaus. After the third small glass he became philosophical and uttered the following aphorisms:

"Life is a flood."

"Money does not make the man."

"Man is ephemeral."

"Ah! But love is pleasant!"

Then taking Schaunard into his confidence he told him of his clandestine liaison with a young girl named Euphémie. He gave such a detailed description of the young girl that Schaunard was assailed by a strange suspicion which became a certainty when the landlord showed him a letter.

"Hell!" cried Schaunard when he saw the signature. "The cruel woman!"

"What's the matter?" asked the Bohemians, astonished

at the use of such language.

"Look," said Schaunard, "this is Phémie's letter. See that blot...it's her signature." And he circulated his former mistress' letter.

She opened with these words: My darling boy.

"I...I am her darling boy," said the landlord endeavouring unsuccessfully to rise.

"Good!" said Marcel, who was watching him. "He's cast anchor!"

"O Phémie! Cruel Phémie!" murmured Schaunard. "What a punishment!"

"I furnished a small apartment for her in Coquenard street, No. 12," said the landlord. "She's pretty...very pretty...she's expensive too...but sincere love has no price, and then I get twenty thousand francs in rent...She needs money now...Poor darling! I'll give her that.. it'll please her..." He plunged a hand towards Marcel's rent. "Heavens! where is it?" he cried astonished and tapping the table.

The money had disappeared.

"I can't believe it of a man like him," said Marcel. "My conscience, my sense of decency forbids me to pay my rent into the hands of a debauched old man. I will not pay him. My soul at least will remain clean. What morals! And a bald-headed man at that!"

The landlord rose unsteadily and proclaimed one of those senseless drunken discourses.

Having been absent for about two hours his wife, who felt uneasy, sent a servant to look for him. When the servant saw him she screamed with surprise.

"What have you done to my master?" she asked the Bohemians.

"Nothing," replied Marcel, "He came in to claim his rent. Since we had no money we asked him to wait."

"But he's drunk!" said the servant.

"Yes, but long before he came in," said Rodolphe. "He told us he had been arranging his wine cellar."

"He was so drunk," added Colline, "that he wanted to give us our receipts without taking the money."

"Give them to his wife," said the artist handing over the receipts, "We are honest people and don't wish to profit by his present state."

"O God! What'll madam say?" exclaimed the servant leading the landlord, who was barely able to stand, out of the room.

"At last!" exclaimed Marcel.

"He'll return tomorrow," said Rodolphe. "He's seen the money."

"When he returns," said the artist, "we'll threaten him with informing his wife about his liaison with young Phémie. He'll give us time."

When the landlord left the four Bohemians sat down once more to their drinking and smoking. Only Marcel among them remained sober. From time to time, at the least noise he heard on the stairs, he would run to open the door. But the noise always stopped on the lower landing. The artist eventually sat down in a corner near the fire. When midnight struck Musette had not arrived.

"Well," thought Marcel, "perhaps she wasn't at home when my letter was delivered. She'll get it this evening when she returns, and she'll come tomorrow. I'll still have a fire. She will come. Till tomorrow then."

And he fell asleep.

Just at the moment Marcel fell asleep, dreaming of her, Musette left Sidonie's. Musette was not alone. A young man, the Seraph, accompanied her, a carriage waited at the door, and both of them entered it and drove away at a gallop.

The lansquenet party continued.

"Where's Musette?" someone asked suddenly.

"And where's the Seraph?" asked another.

Sidonie began to laugh.

"They've left," she said. "It's a curious story...Musette is really a funny girl! Listen..."

And she related how Musette, having got angry with Maurice and left him to visit Marcel had, by mere chance, stepped into her house and met the young Seraph.

"I did suspect something," concluded Sidonie, "I watched them all evening. Well, in brief, they suddenly left without telling a word. It's very funny, indeed, especially when Musette is supposed to be mad about Marcel."

"If she's mad about him of what use is the Seraph, who's only a boy? He's never had a mistress," said a young man.

"She's probably going to teach him to read," said the journalist.

"It's the same," replied Sidonie, "since she loves Marcel, why the Seraph? That's the position."

"Yes, but why?"

For the next five days, by merely remaining at home, the Bohemians led the happiest life in the world. They sat at table from morning to night. The whole room, in a pantagruelian atmosphere, was in a state of delightful disorder. On a bench, completely covered with oyster shells, lay bottles of divers sizes. The table was full of all kinds of rubbish and a forest burned

in the chimney.

On the sixth day Colline, who was the master of ceremonies, drew up, as he had been doing every morning, the menu for breakfast, for lunch, for dinner and for supper and submitted it for the consideration of his friends who read through and signed it. But when he opened the drawer, which was their cash-box, to take out the necessary money, he stepped back a few feet and turned as pale as Banquo's ghost.

"What is it?" demanded the others nonchalantly.

"There are...there are only thirty sous!" announced the philosopher

"Hell! Hell!" exclaimed the others, "that's going to cause some alterations in our menu. But thirty sous well used!... It's the same, only the truffles will be difficult."

A few minutes later they sat down to table. There were three beautifully and symmetrically dressed plates, a plate of herrings, a plate of potatoes and a plate of cheese. In the chimney two small brands, about as thick as a finger, smoked. Outside the snow fell relentlessly. The four Bohemians gravely spread out their serviettes.

"Funny," said Marcel, "but this herring tastes like pheasant."

"That's because of the way I've dressed it," replied Colline.

A happy song could be heard climbing the stairs and knocked at the door. Marcel, who trembled with excitement, ran to open it.

Musette threw her arms round his neck and hugged him for about five minutes. Marcel felt himself trembling in her arms.

"What do you want?" he asked her.

"I'm cold," Musette replied mechanically, approaching the fire.

"We had such a grand fire!" said Marcel.

"Yes," said Musette, glancing at the remains of the feast on the table, "I've come too late."

"But why?" asked Marcel.

"Why?" Musette repeated, blushing a little. She sat on Marcel's lap. She shivered and her hands were violet with the cold.

"You weren't free?" Marcel whispered in her ear.

"I? Not free!" exclaimed the beautiful girl. "O Marcel! If I were among the stars, in Paradise, and you called I would come to you. I? Not free?" She shivered again.

"There are five chairs here," said Rodolphe, "It's an odd number and the fifth chair is awful." And breaking the chair against the wall, he threw the pieces into the fire. The fire

was suddenly resuscitated into clear and happy flames. Then, beckoning to Colline and Schaunard, the poet led them out with him.

"Where are you going?" asked Marcel.

"To buy some tobacco," they replied.

"Havana," added Schaunard, making a sign to Marcel, who thanked him with a look.

"Why didn't you come earlier?" he asked her again when they were alone.

"It's true, I am a little late..."

"Five days to cross the Neuf bridge! Did you have to cross the Pyrenees?" asked Marcel.

Musette lowered her head and remained silent.

"Naughty girl!" said the artist sadly, lightly tapping his mistress' back. "But what were you doing?"

"You know," replied Musette.

"But what were you doing since I wrote to you?" persisted Marcel.

"Don't question me!" Musette said kissing him several times. "Don't ask me anything! Let me warm myself beside you. You see, I've put on my new dress...Poor Maurice, he couldn't understand why I left him...The fire's good," she said stretching out her small hands towards the flames. "I'll stay till tomorrow. Would you like that?"

"It'll be cold here," said Marcel, "and we have nothing to eat. You've come too late."

"That'll be like old times!" said Musette.

Rodolphe, Colline and Schaunard remained twenty-four hours in search of their tobacco. When they returned they found Marcel alone.

After an absence of six days the Viscount Maurice saw Musette return. He did not reproach her, but only inquired why she seemed so sad.

"I've quarrelled with Marcel," she said.

"But perhaps you may yet return to him," said Maurice.

"What did you say?" said Musette, "I must breathe the air of that life from time to time. My silly life is like a song, each of my love affairs is like a couplet, but Marcel is the refrain."

## CHAPTER XX

### MIMI HAS FEATHERS

"No, no, no, you are no longer Lisette, neither are you Mimi... you are a Viscountess today and perhaps the day after tomorrow

you'll be a Duchess. You have placed your feet on the ladder of the great, the door of your dreams has at last opened wide before you, and you shall enter it victorious and triumphant. That's certain. Your white hands were made for idleness and have long been linked in an aristocratic alliance. And at last you have a coat of arms! But you shall still prefer that which youth lends your beauty, your blue eyes and your pale face. Whether noble or villainous I must admit you are charming. I saw you on the street the other day, helping, with a gloved hand, to lift up your dress, to keep the dirt away no doubt, but mostly, to show off your embroidered petticoat and transparent stockings. You wore a very stylish hat and the rich lace which adorned it seemed to worry you. A grave problem, no doubt! You couldn't decide which was more valuable to your coquetry, to remove it or not to remove it. By lowering it you risked not being recognised by those of your friends you wanted to meet. And certainly they would have passed you ten times without knowing that opulent cover hid Mimi. On the other hand by lifting it you would not be able to see, and what good was that? But you settled the difficulty wisely by lifting and lowering every ten paces that marvellous fabric, woven no doubt in Flanders and costing as much as the whole of your old wardrobe...Excuse me, Mimi! Countess! You see I was right when I told you to have patience that the future was full of silks, jewels and suppers. Incredibly enough you did not want to believe me! But my predictions have come true. And would you believe me now if I told you you will go still further? Would you believe me if I told you that in the depths of your future I can hear the trampling and neighing of horses harnessed to a blue coupé driven by a powdered coachman who, as he lowers the step before you asks: 'Where to Madam?' Would you believe me if I told that later...much later, when you will have realised your long-cherished ambition, you will hold a table d'hôte at Belleville or Batignolles, that old military men will courtesy to you and reformed Celadons come to play clandestine games of lansquenet or baccarat? But before this period, when the sun of your youth will have declined, though you may still wear ells of silk and velvet, you would have melted away many patrimonies in the crucible of your whims, and you would have changed your coat of arms. You will in turn wear the coronet of a baroness, the crown of a countess and the imperial diadem of a marchioness. 'Inconsistency' will be your device and, according to whim or necessity, in turn or at the same time, you will make all those numerous admirers queue up in the ante-room of your heart, just as they would queue up at the door of a theatre. Your mind will be

unburdened of its memories and replaced by ambition. Your future road is soft and beautiful and we only hope that your luxurious clothes won't soon become the shroud to cover your gaiety."

Thus spoke the painter Marcel to Mimi whom he met three or four days after her second separation from the poet Rodolphe. Considering the mild jests which appeared in her horoscope, Mimi was not deceived by Marcel's beautiful words and, in spite of her new position and title, knew that he was making fun of her.

"You're very wicked, Marcel," said Mimi. "I was always friendly towards you while I was Rodolphe's mistress. If I've left him it's his fault. He sent me away. And how did he treat me during the last days I spent with him? I was most unhappy! You don't know Rodolphe. He is bad-tempered and jealous and was slowly killing me. He loves me, I know, but his love is dangerous, like a fire-arm. And the life I led for those fifteen months! Look Marcel, I don't want to make out I am better than I was, but I suffered with Rodolphe...you know that. But it wasn't really that which made me leave, no, I assure you, I got used to that...but, I repeat, he sent me away. He was conceited enough to tell me that if I stayed on with him I'd have no heart left...He told me he no longer loved me and that I should find another lover. He went even so far as to choose a young man for me and acted as gooseberry. And I accepted him more through spite than necessity. I didn't love him. You yourself know I don't love very young men, they're annoying and as sentimental as a harmonica. Anyway what's done is done, I don't regret it and I'll do the same thing again. Now that Rodolphe no longer has me and knows I'm happy with another he's furious and unhappy. A friend of mine saw him the other day and told me his eyes were red with crying. I'm not surprised, I knew he'd want to run after me again. But you can tell him he's wasting his time. Has he changed a lot?" Mimi asked with a change of tone.

"Yes, he has changed," replied Marcel.

"He's lonely, but what can I do? He wanted it. You can console him."

"Console him!" Marcel exclaimed calmly. "Don't worry. Mimi, the worst is over."

"You're not telling the truth," Mimi said with an ironic pout, "Rodolphe can't be consoled as easily as that. If only you knew the state I left him in! It was Friday, I did not want to spend the night with my new lover because Friday is a bad day."

"You're wrong...in love Friday is a good day. The an-

cients used to say *Dies Veneris*."

"I don't know Latin," said Mimi. "Well, when I returned from Paul's I found Rodolphe keeping watch on the street. It was late, past midnight, and I was hungry. I begged Rodolphe to get something for supper. Half an hour later he returned with some bread, wine, sardines, cheese and cake. He was as pale as death, trembled, and walked about the room like a man who did not know what he was doing. In a corner he saw several packets of my clothes. The sight of them seemed to make him sick, and he placed a screen before them. We then started to eat. He tried to make me drink but I felt neither thirsty nor hungry and my heart was oppressed. It was cold, we had no fire and we could hear the wind whistling up the chimney. It was very sad. Rodolphe gazed steadily at me. He placed his hand in mine and I could feel him trembling. 'It's the funeral supper of our love,' I said to myself. I could say nothing and didn't have the courage to remove my hand. 'I'm sleepy,' I said at last, 'it's late, let's go to sleep.' Rodolphe stared at me. I had one of his cravats on my head to keep the cold away. He removed it without saying a word. 'Why did you take it off?' I asked him, 'I'm cold.' 'O Mimi!' he replied, 'won't you wear your small striped bonnet just for tonight?' It was a brown and white striped cotton bonnet. Rodolphe loved to see me in it because it recalled so many beautiful nights we had spent together. Being the last night I would spend with him I dared not refuse. I put on my striped bonnet which was among the parcels. I forgot to replace the screen. He immediately rose and hid them as before. 'Good-night,' he said. 'Good-night," I replied. At first I thought he was going to kiss me, and I would not have prevented him, but he only took my hand and raised it to his lips. You know how fond he was of kissing my hands. I heard his teeth snap and felt his body go as cold as marble. He continued to hold my hand and placed his head on my shoulder which was soon wet with his tears. Rodolphe was in a frightful state! He chewed at the bed sheet to prevent himself crying. But I could hear his suppressed sobs and his tears, first warm then cold, poured over my shoulders. I had to summon all my courage. I had only to utter one word, to turn my head and my mouth would have met Rodolphe's. We could have made up again. I really believed he would die, in my arms, or at least go mad as he once did, remember? I was giving in, I could feel it. I couldn't remain indifferent to such unhappiness. But just then I remembered his words: 'You'll have no heart if you stay with me, because I no longer love you.' When I remembered those hard words I would rather have seen Rodolphe dead. At last, defeated by sleep, I dozed. I could

still hear Rodolphe sobbing and, I promise you Marcel, I heard him sobbing all night. When morning came I glanced at the lover whom I was leaving for the arms of another. I was terrified by Rodolphe's ravaged face.. He rose, like me, without saying a word and looked as if he would drop with the first step, he was so weak and depressed. However, he dressed quickly and asked me where I was going and when. I said I didn't know. He left without wishing me, or shaking my hand. That's how we parted. What he must have felt when he returned and found me gone I don't know."

"I was there when he returned," said Marcel to Mimi, who was breathless after having spoken for so long. "When he took his key from the woman she said, 'She's gone.' 'I'm not surprised,' Rodolphe replied, 'I expected it.' He climbed up to his room where I found him. I feared a scene, but there was none. 'I'll rent another room tomorrow,' he said, 'we'll do it together. Let's have dinner now.' I thought he wanted to get drunk, but I was wrong. We had a sober dinner at a restaurant where he sometimes took you. I thought I'd order some Beaune wine to please him. 'It was Mimi's favourite wine,' he said. 'We've drunk enough of it together at this very table. I remember one day, holding up her glass, which had already been filled many times over, she said: 'Fill again o balm of my heart!' 'It was a mediocre put don't you think?' Seeing him disposed towards the path of remembrance I spoke of other matters, and you weren't mentioned. He spent the entire evening with me and seemed as calm as the Mediterranean. What astonished me was that his calm was no affectation. It was a sincere indifference. We returned home at midnight. 'You seem surprised at my tranquillity,' he said. 'Well, let me draw a comparison and, though it may be vulgar, it is at least just. My heart is like a fountain whose tap has been left open all night and in the morning there isn't a single drop of water left. It's the same with my heart. I have sobbed all night and have no tears left. It's strange, but I feel myself richer for it, and a night of suffering has left me completely dry, my word of honour; and on the very same bed I shed tears last night near a woman who was no more moved than a stone and who has now left me for another I am going to sleep like a porter who's had an excellent day.' 'Melodrama,' I thought to myself. 'No sooner I leave he'll probably dash his head against the wall. However, I returned to my room but did not sleep. At three in the morning I heard a noise and ran to Rodolphe's room believing I'd find him in a desperate state..."

"Well?" said Mimi.

"Well, my dear, Rodolphe was asleep and everything proved

that his sleep was undisturbed."

"Quite possible," said Mimi. "He was so tired after the preceding night...but the next day?"

"The next day Rodolphe woke me early, we rented rooms elsewhere and shifted in the same evening."

"What did he say?" asked Mimi. "What did he say when he left the room we occupied, and in which he had loved me so much?"

"He packed calmly," replied Marcel, "and when he found a pair of gloves and two or three letters you had forgotten..."

"Yes, yes I know," Mimi said, who had forgotten them on purpose. "What did he do?"

"I remember well," Marcel replied. "He threw the letters into the fire and the gloves out of the window, but without emotion, without pose, quite naturally, as one does when getting rid of some useless article."

"My dear Marcel, I assure you I welcome such cruel indifference. But I don't believe you and, in spite of all you've said, I'm convinced the poet has a broken heart."

"But the pieces are still intact," said Marcel.

During this colloquy on the public road Viscount Paul waited for his new mistress who, finding it late, was perfectly disagreeable to the Viscount. But he sat at her feet and repeated her favourite poem, the fact that she was charming, as pale as the moon, as sweet as a lamb and above all, that he loved her for the beauties of her soul.

"My lover Rodolphe was not so exclusive," she thought, unrolling the waves of her beautiful brown hair on to her snow white shoulders.

As Marcel has already informed us, Rodolphe appeared to be thoroughly cured of his love for Mimi and, three or four days after his separation, had changed completely. He was attired so elegantly that his very mirror could not recognise him. Nothing about him showed that he intended taking his life, as Mimi maintained with all sorts of hypocritical sympathies. Rodolphe was in fact perfectly calm. He would listen, without being in the least affected, to the stories told him of the new and sumptuous life of his former mistress, who amused herself by sending such information through a young man that was her confidante and who had occasion to meet Rodolphe almost every evening.

"Mimi is very happy with Paul," the poet would be told. "She's madly in love with him. Only one thing worries her, that you may try to disturb her tranquillity. Besides, that would be dangerous for you, because the Viscount adores his mistress."

and spent two years at a fencing school."

"Tell her not to worry," replied Rodolphe. "I have no desire to disturb her honeymoon. As for her young lover, he should give up his dagger, like Gastibelza. I want to have nothing to do with a man who still clings to illusions."

They did not fail to report to Mimi the attitude with which her old lover received all these details. She would always shrug her shoulders and say:

"Good, good, we'll see what happens in a few days."

However, more than anybody else, Rodolphe himself was astonished by this sudden indifference, which, without passing through the normal transition from sadness to melancholy, was immediately succeeded by storms which shook him for some days. Oblivion, usually slow in coming, particularly to those who have lost in love, oblivion which is invited with loud cries, and with loud cries repelled when it approaches—this pitiless consoler had suddenly, and without warning, invaded Rodolphe's heart, where the very name of the woman he had loved awoke no echo. Strangely enough Rodolphe, who was able to recall past memories and those who had figured or exercised an influence on his past life, strangely enough, in spite of making efforts, he could not distinctly remember after four days, the very features of the mistress who had broken his very heart. He could no longer see those shining eyes of hers, nor hear the sound of the voice whose angry and tender tones had often made him delirious with joy. A poet, who was a friend of the Bohemians, and had not seen Rodolphe since his separation, met him one evening. Rodolphe seemed busy and preoccupied, and walked quickly down the street twirling his cane.

"Well," said the poet, "At last!" He held out his hand and examined Rodolphe with curiosity. Noticing that he looked downcast he felt he would have to adopt a sympathetic tone.

"Courage man, I know it must be a shock but such things will happen. Better now than later. In three months you'll be completely cured."

"What are you talking about?" asked Rodolphe, "I'm not sick."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the other, "Don't be so indifferent about it. I know the whole story and if I didn't I could read it on your face."

"I think you're making a mistake. It's true I'm annoyed this evening, but you're wrong about the cause."

"Why defend yourself? It's quite natural. One cannot very easily break up an association which has lasted nearly two years."

"They all tell me the same thing," said Rodolphe impatient-

ly. "But you're wrong, like the others. I'm sad, and perhaps look it, because my tailor hasn't brought me my new coat. That's why I'm annoyed."

"Bad, bad," said the other laughing.

"Not bad at all, but good, very good, excellent even. Listen to me and you'll know why."

"Yes, I'm waiting."

"Well," said Rodolphe, "you know that small things can often produce great effects. I had to pay an important visit this evening and couldn't because my coat hadn't arrived. Understand?"

"No it's not a sufficient reason for being melancholy. You're sad...because...It's beastly of you to pretend. That's my opinion."

"You're very obstinate," replied Rodolphe. "People are always sad when they are deprived of some pleasure or happiness. I had to meet a young lady this evening at her house where a party was being held. Well, a coat must be worn to a party, I had no coat, my tailor disappointed, therefore I couldn't go to the party. The young lady has probably met someone else and thus, as I was saying, I have been deprived of a pleasure and I'm naturally sad, and perhaps I even look it."

"Quite," said the friend. "You've just escaped from one hell and you're now trying to enter another. But, my dear friend, when I met you, you looked as if you were waiting for someone. We happen to be near your old mistress' house. Aren't you waiting for her?"

"No, I have other reasons for being here. We're as far from each other as the North pole from the South. Besides, at this hour, my old mistress must be seated before the fire taking grammar lessons from Viscount Paul, who wants to lead her back to the path of virtue through orthography! God, how he spoils her! So, you see, your suspicions are absurd. Instead of following the worn trail of my former mistress I'm, on the other hand, on the trail of my new one."

"Don't tell me you're already in love?" said the poet..

"I am," replied Rodolphe. "My heart resembles lodgings which are rented out as soon as a tenant leaves. When one woman vacates my heart I put up a notice for another. The place is now habitable and perfectly restored."

"Who's this new idol? Where did you meet her and when?"

"We'll proceed in order," said Rodolphe. "When Mimi left I felt I'd never love again. I had been battered about much. To put it briefly, I thought my heart was dead, absolutely dead, and wanted to bury it like Marlborough. I gave a small dinner

and invited some friends."

"You didn't invite me!"

"Sorry, but I didn't know your address. Well one of the guests brought a girl, a young girl, who had also been deserted by her lover. One of my friends told her my story. He spoke to her of the fine qualities of my heart, that poor corpse we were burying, and invited her to drink to its eternal repose. 'On the contrary,' she said, 'let's drink to its health.' She winked at me, a wink to awaken the dead, and she had hardly completed her drink when I felt my heart singing the O Filii of the Resurrection. What would you have done in my place?"

"A fine question!...What's her name?"

"I don't know yet. All I know is that I can expect a dowry of gaiety."

"Is she pretty?"

"Very pretty, particularly her colouring, it's like something from Watteau's palette. She's a blonde."

"A blonde? You surprise me."

"Yes I've had enough of ivory and ebony."

"Poor Mimi," said the friend. "Forgotten so soon!"

This name, suddenly thrown in the middle of Rodolphe's gaiety, gave the conversation another turn. Rodolphe took his friend by the arm and related at length the cause of his break up with Mimi, the fears which assailed him when she had left him, how he had believed that with her she had taken all that was youthful and passionate, and two days later realised he had been deceived when his heart, inundated with tears, had warmed, lit up and finally exploded with the first passionate glance, the first woman he met had thrown him.

"It's a miracle isn't it?" Rodolphe said to the poet who, having had considerable experience in all the various phases of love, replied:

"No, no, my friend, it's no more a miracle to you than others. What has happened to you once happened to me. When the women we love become our mistresses they cease to be what they really are. We not only see them with the eyes of a lover, but that of a poet. Just as a painter throws a purple robe over his model so we dress our mistress in the cloak of our ideals and dreams. Should she tear away the cloak and reveal herself as she really is, her nature and her instincts, her shining eyes and pale mouth, we only put back the cloak and exclaim: 'You're lying! You're lying! I love you and you love me too. You're beautiful and young and at the bottom of your heart, in spite of all its vices, is love! I love you!' Then, in the end, we discover we've been blind and duped into choosing a really miserable person whom we had worshipped the

previous evening. We take back the cloak only to throw it on the shoulders of another who has suddenly developed an aureole. Besides we are all monstrous egoists. Who loves for love's sake? You understand me, don't you?"

"I do, as surely as two and two make four."

Two days later Mimi learnt that Rodolphe had a new mistress. She only wanted to know one thing, whether he kissed her hands as often as he did hers.

"Oh yes, quite as often," Marcel informed her. "He kisses each hair on her head, one after the other.

"I'm glad," said Mimi passing her hand through her hair, "I'm glad he didn't do that to me. Is it true he no longer loves me?"

"You?...love you still?"

"I loved him."

"If you loved him then even at this hour there may still be another chance."

"That's quite true," agreed Marcel. "His love for you may later become like those flowers we place, fresh and perfumed, between the pages of a book which afterwards die and wither, but still retain a vague perfume of their original freshness."

## CHAPTER XXI

### ROMEO AND JULIET

DRESSED like an illustration from his own journal *l'Echarpe d'Iris*, gloved, polished, his moustache waxed, a stick in his hand, a monocle in his eye, happy and strangely handsome, this is how, one evening in the month of November, our friend, the poet Rodolphe, appeared. He stopped on the boulevard and waited for a carriage.

Rodolphe waiting for a carriage? What has happened?

At the moment when the transformed poet was twirling his moustache and chewing an enormous cigar between his teeth, one of his friends passed along the same boulevard. It was the philosopher Gustave Colline. Rodolphe saw him approaching and recognised him immediately. And who would not when they had once seen him? Colline was burdened, as usual, with a dozen or so books. Dressed in his famous hazel coat, whose weight made one suspect it must have been tailored by the Romans, and wearing one of those large brimmed beaver hats under which swarm a crowd of philosophical rivers, and which some have called the Maubin helmet of modern philosophy, Gustave Colline walked slowly along thinking of the preface to his latest work which was still in the press...As he drew near

Rodolphe Colline for a moment thought he recognised him, but the extreme elegance of the figure made him uncertain.

"Rodolphe gloved and with a cane! A chimera! A utopia! Besides, at this hour, my unhappy friend must be composing a melancholy poem on the departure of young Mimi. Really, I myself regret it. She could make fine coffee which is a beverage for serious minds. But I do hope Rodolphe will get over it and find a new coffee maker."

Nevertheless, as he drew near Rodolphe, Colline was forced to accept it as a fact. It was Rodolphe, gloved and with a cane. It seemed impossible, but it was true.

"Well, well!" Colline said, "I don't think I'm making a mistake...It's you I'm sure."

"Quite right," replied Rodolphe.

Colline examined his friend with an amused and surprised expression on his face. But he suddenly noticed two very peculiar articles Rodolphe was carrying. One was a rope ladder, the other a cage with a fluttering bird in it.

"Surprised?" Rodolphe asked him, "I'll explain, but let's get out of here. It's cold."

They entered a café.

Colline could not take his eyes off either the rope ladder or the cage. In the warmer atmosphere of the café the bird suddenly burst into song.

"What's that?" asked the philosopher pointing to the ladder.

"It's the symbol of the relationship between my mistress and I," Rodolphe replied.

"And that?" Colline asked, pointing to the bird.

"That," said the poet, "is a clock."

"Please speak in plain English, not in parables."

"Have you read Shakespeare?"

"Have I read Shakespeare? To be or not to be...That's what you call great philosophy. Yes I've read Shakespeare."

"Have you read *Romeo and Juliet*?"

"Have I read *Romeo and Juliet*!"

And he began to recite:

"Wilt thou be gone? it is not yet near day.

It was the nightingale and not the lark,

That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear.

"But what about it?"

"Don't you understand now?" Rodolphe said, pointing to the ladder and the bird. "I'm in love, in love with a girl named Juliet."

"Well?" Colline asked impatiently.

"Well, since my new mistress' name is Juliet I've resolved to re-enaot Shakespeare's little drama. In the first place my name's no longer Rodolphe but Romeo, and you'll oblige me by calling me that. I've even had new visiting cards printed and shall soon be dressed in velvet and carry a sword."

"To kill Tybald with?"

"Quite," continued Rodolphe, "And this ladder will help me to climb into my mistress' room, which has a balcony."

"But the bird?" asked Colline obstinately.

"Ah, the bird! Well, although it's a pigeon it must play the part of a nightingale and every morning indicate the exact time when I should embrace my mistress for the last time. Finally, to complete my imitation of Shakespeare, I've hired a nurse for her. What do you think of it?"

"Very pretty indeed," replied Colline. "But would you also clear up the mystery of that expensive coat you're wearing? Have you inherited a fortune?"

Rodolphe made no reply but signed to a waiter and threw him a coin. Then he shook his pockets and began to sing.

"Only a few louis," he said.

"Gold louis?" Colline asked in a voice almost strangled with astonishment.

And the two friends separated, Colline to carry the tale of Rodolphe's opulence and Rodolphe to his home.

This took place in the week following Rodolphe's second separation from Mimi. The poet, when his mistress had deserted him, suddenly felt the need to find new lodgings. Accompanied by his friend Marcel he went out to look for them and rented two rooms on the same storey. Rodolphe's room was incomparably more comfortable than any he had ever occupied. The furniture was good, and on the chimney-piece were two porcelain vases between which stood an alabaster clock with the most artistic embellishments. Rodolphe hid the vases away in a cupboard and, when the landlord came to wind up the clock, which had stopped, the poet begged him to leave it alone.

"I don't mind the clock being there," he said, "but only as an *objet d'art*. It has stopped at a very beautiful hour midnight and the moment it shows five minutes past twelve I shift out...! A clock!" exclaimed Rodolphe who had never been able to submit to the tyranny of time. "It's an enemy, inexorably ticking out one's existence hour by hour, minute by minute. I cannot sleep peacefully in the same room as one of those instruments of torture...its hands seem to extend to my bed and prod me when I am still plunged in the foolish sweetness of a dream...it seems to say: 'Get up, escape from the visions of your dreams (and sometimes from those of reality)'"

put on your hat and coat, get a move on, it's time, ding, ding, ding... A calendar is bad enough but a clock paralyzes my mind!"

While he spoke he examined the room and could not suppress that feeling of uneasiness one usually experiences on entering new lodgings.

"It's strange," he thought, "but the places we live in exercise a mysterious influence over our thoughts and consequently our actions. This room is cold and silent like a tomb. Gaiety can have no place here, laughter itself would die with no responsive echo from the low ceiling which is cold and white like a sky of snow. Alas! what will my life be between these four walls?"

However, less than four days later, the gloomy room was full of light and resounded with joyous laughter. The presence of numerous bottles to some extent explained the change. Rodolphe himself looked happy. He had isolated himself in a corner of the room with a charming young woman to whom he was making the most ardent love. Before the end of the evening he had arranged to meet her the following day.

"Well," he said to himself when he was alone, "it hasn't been a bad evening at all. I think I'll be happy here."

The next day, at the appointed hour, Juliet arrived. The entire evening was spent in explanations. Juliet knew about Rodolphe's recent rupture with Mimi, whom he had loved so dearly; she also knew that he had taken her back and was afraid lest the same thing should happen again.

"I don't want to make myself ridiculous," she said with a pretty mutinous gesture, "I'm warning you, once I'm mistress here no one must take my place."

Rodolphe had to summon all his most persuasive eloquence to convince her that her fears were groundless. The young girl on her side wanted to be convinced and listened attentively to him. The clock struck midnight.. Rodolphe wanted her to stay.

"No," she replied at his insistence, "why such hurry? I'll come again tomorrow."

The following week she came every evening and repeated the same words when Rodolphe urged her to stay. Rodolphe was very annoyed. He could not appreciate the delay as a short sentimental preface, which was how Juliet viewed it. It was a stratagem she employed to discover whether their relationship could develop into true love. And it seemed to succeed. With every visit she noticed Rodolphe become more sincere. The constant delays made her more desirable, and the letters she sometimes wrote gave promise of an early consummation of his legitimate desires. He suggested they should model their own affair

on the immortal love between Romeo and Juliet. She found the idea quite amusing and consented. It was that same evening that Colline met Rodolphe who had bought a rope ladder and, there being no nightingale, he bought a pigeon, which he was assured, sang every morning at sunrise.

When Rodolphe returned home he reflected that climbing a rope ladder would not be easy. He felt that he should rehearse the balcony scene, if, apart from the risk of a tumble, he did not want to cut a ridiculous figure before the very eyes of his mistress who was waiting for him. Having hung the ladder on two nails, which he hammered firmly into the wall, he spent the next two hours performing the most weird gymnastics. After an infinite number of trials he had succeeded in breaking a dozen of the rungs.

"I think I'll be all right," he said to himself. "When the time comes love will lend me wings."

Then carrying his ladder and cage he made his way to Juliet's. Her room was situated in the corner of a small garden and really had a balcony. But the room was on the ground floor and the balcony presented no formidable obstacle. Rodolphe was little disappointed.

"It doesn't matter," he said to Juliet, "we can enact the balcony scene just the same. And this is the bird," he added hanging the cage in a corner of the room.

The next morning at precisely five o'clock the pigeon filled the room with a prolonged cooing which awoke the two sleeping lovers.

"Well," said Juliet, "it's time we made our desperate farewell, don't you think?"

"It's early," replied Rodolphe.

"I'm getting up," said Juliet.

"Whatever for?"

"I'm famishing with hunger."

"How extraordinarily alike we are in some respects. I'm hungry too," Rodolphe said rising and dressing hastily.

Juliet had already lit the fire, and was foraging in the cupboard, before Rodolphe joined her.

"Onions!" said Rodolphe.

"And bacon," said Juliet.

"And butter."

"And bread."

"Is that all!"

The optimistic and thoughtless pigeon continued to coo on its perch. Romeo and Juliet looked at each other and then turned to the insistent pigeon. But hunger being a more imperious adviser they decided to ignore it. Rodolphe gravely melted

the frozen butter over the fire and Juliet cleaned the onions.

## CHAPTER XXII

## EPILOGUE TO A LOVE AFFAIR

Soon after Rodolphe finally separated from Mimi, who had left him for Paul, he found a new mistress, a blonde, for whose sake he was so foolish as to dress himself up like Romeo. But from the very beginning the affair was destined never to last long. As far as he was concerned it was the result of his disappointment in having lost Mimi whereas with Juliet it was a mere passing caprice. She was no fool. She understood Rodolphe's mood perfectly and played up to it. She soon realised that the poet had flung himself into this new affair that he might forget Mimi. But the exact contrary happened. Mimi lived more alive than ever in his heart.

One day Juliet met a medical student with whom she had once been in love. They talked of Rodolphe.

"My dear," the student said, "that man's using you to heal his own wounds, to cauterise his heart in fact. You're a fool to become his mistress."

"Do you think so?" Juliet asked bursting into laughter and that same evening proved how false his judgment had been by going out with him.

Rodolphe came to hear about it, through one of his officious friends who could not keep such news to himself, and, pretending to be very hurt, threatened to give her up. He locked himself up in his room and tried to work, but in vain. Evening after evening passed wearily during which, after much perspiration and a prodigal use of ink, he found he could produce only twenty lines containing ideas which were as worn and threadbare as the Wandering Jew. Rereading them he felt like a man who had sown roses but had reaped nettles. He tore the page angrily into pieces and trampled them under his feet.

"I'm lost!" he said slapping his breast, "the cord is broken!"

He continued, however, to work, but the result was always a failure. Gradually he fell into one of those languid, discouraged moods which undermines the strongest pride and stupefies the most intelligent mind. Nothing could be more moving than those solitary struggles between the rebellious and the importunate artist, or nothing more terrible than those passionate prayers to a scornful and fugitive Muse. The most violent human anguish, or the deepest wounds suffered by the heart, are

nothing compared with the torture that one who lives by the perilous trade of the imagination undergoes. These crises were usually succeeded by a painful despondency during which Rodolphe would remain for hours in a state of stupid immobility, his elbows on the table and his eyes fixed on the blank sheet of paper before him. As his mind floundered in the elusive sea of poetical thought fantastic pictures, unrolling the panorama of his past, would slowly pass before him. He recalled the days when he first embarked on his career as a poet, laborious days spent only in the company of the Muse, who came to relieve the poverty of his thoughts with the fairy riches of her imagination.

But suddenly, in the middle of this tranquil and regular life, appeared the face of a woman. The Muse, who had hitherto reigned supreme, withdrew before such a rival. Rodolphe seemed unable to decide. While a glance implored the Muse to remain, a gesture to the stranger invited her to enter. And, indeed, how could he refuse? How could he refuse a woman who came surrounded with all the seductive beauty of youth? How could he ignore that delicate mouth with its full red lips and promising smile, those small white hands extended towards him? Her eyes seemed to say 'I am love,' and her lips, 'I am pleasure!' How could Rodolphe refuse? Wasn't she, after all, the poem he had been seeking? Hadn't she been able to transport him to that other world in which he was losing sight of all earthly things? And if he had suffered because of her, wasn't it in expiation of the joy she had brought him? Humanity forbids the enjoyment of absolute joy as an impiety. The Christian law pardons those who have loved because they must also have suffered, and earthly love can only become a divine passion when it has been purified by tears. He passed once again through all the phases of the strange love i.e. had for his former mistress, from the first flush of the honeymoon to the domestic storms which had decided its final break up. He recalled the wide repertoire of her deceit, he could hear her again singing her favourite song with that stoical attitude which enabled her to face both good and bad fortune with equal indifference.

But what had he gained? Mimi no doubt deceived him, but it had been his own fault. It was he who had taken the trouble to discover and prove it, and sharpened the very sword which was to pierce his heart. But had Mimi really deceived him? Had she really been unfaithful to him because of another man? More often than not it was the result of a hat or a ribbon which she desired. Had he realised that calm tranquil life which he had hoped for? Alas, no! It was more tranquil

with her in the house. Formerly at least he was able to open his heart out by relating all that he had suffered to anyone who cared to listen, and often he would receive the sympathy he craved for. Now, on the other hand, he suffered in silence. Whereas before he could see that she remained at home now he could exercise no such control. He could raise no protest now when he met her arm in arm with her lover on the street, happy no doubt and on their way to some pleasure house.

This miserable life lasted for about four months, but gradually he regained his former serenity. His friend Marcel, who had gone on a long journey in order to forget Musette, returned to Paris and stayed with Rodolphe. They were able to console each other.

One day, it was a Sunday, while crossing the Luxembourg, Rodolphe passed Mimi. She was on her way to a ball and was beautifully dressed. She inclined her head towards Rodolphe, who responded with a salute. Rodolphe was surprised to find that, although the sudden encounter sent his heart pounding, he soon became calm. He strolled for some time through the Luxembourg and then returned home. When Marcel entered the room he found him, at work.

"What!" Marcel exclaimed, peering over Rodolphe's shoulder, "you're writing verses?"

"Yes, why not?" Rodolphe replied happily. "The old heart isn't dead yet. For the first time since I left Mimi my inspiration has returned. I met her a little while ago."

"Indeed!" Marcel exclaimed uneasily.

"I didn't even speak to her," Rodolphe continued.

"Is that the truth?"

"That's the truth," replied Rodolphe. "It's all over with us, I know it. If I could only return to work I'll forgive her."

"If you know it's finished," retorted Rodolphe, "why write verses?"

For the next eight days Rodolphe worked on his poem. When it was finished he read it out to Marcel, who declared himself satisfied. He even encouraged Rodolphe to use his newly recovered inspiration to compose others.

"Because," he observed, "it wouldn't do for you to live under the shadow of Mimi. But perhaps," he added smiling, "I should practise a little of what I preached, because I haven't forgotten Musette yet."

"We're only young once," said Rodolphe.

"That's true," replied Marcel, "but there are times when I almost wish I were an honest old man, member of the Institute and decorated with several orders. Wouldn't you like to be  
60?"

"At the moment," said Rodolphe, "I'd much prefer to have 60 francs."

A few days later, when Mimi entered a café with her lover Paul, she picked up a revue in which she discovered Rodolphe's verses. She read through them attentively and, realising that they were indirectly dedicated to her, fell into a silent and dreamy mood. Paul, knowing she must be thinking of Rodolphe, attempted to distract her attention.

"Would you like a pair of ear-rings?" he asked her.

"What money can do!" Mimi exclaimed abstractedly.

"And an Italian straw hat," continued Paul.

"No," replied Mimi, "I don't want any of those things. But you'd please me if you bought a copy of this." And she pointed to the revue which contained Rodolphe's poem.

"Certainly not," Paul replied angrily.

"Very well," Mimi said icily. "I shall buy a copy myself with my own money, I may appreciate it better."

The very next day Mimi returned to her old florist shop where she worked until she had earned sufficient to buy a copy of Rodolphe's poem. She learnt the poem by heart and to annoy Paul would every day repeat the poem to his friends.

On the 24th of December the Latin Quarter seemed strangely transformed. From four in the evening it was filled with a clamorous, jostling crowd which was making a concerted effort to take the butchers' and grocers' shops and the restaurants by assault. The attendants, had they even, like Briareus, possessed a thousand arms, would not have been able to serve the customers who flocked into the shops. A long queue stood before the baker's as if a famine had broken out, the wine merchants sold out the produce of three vineyards and a clever statistician would hardly have been able to keep a record of the number of hams and sausages that were distributed in the neighbourhood. Even old Cretaine exhausted nearly eighteen editions of his cakes. Throughout the evening strange noise escaped from the houses, whose windows seemed to be ablaze, and the whole atmosphere was that of a highly successful country fair.

That same evening, Christmas eve, Rodolphe and Marcel walked sadly down the streets and suddenly, on Dauphine street, attracted by the spectacle of tantalising pieces of meat, they stood before the butcher's shop for a while.

"That's a turkey truffle," said Marcel suddenly, pointing to a magnificent fowl across whose epidermis one could see the tubercles with which it was stuffed. "I've seen some impious people eating a turkey like that without first kneeling down."

added the painter, throwing the turkey a glance which could have roasted it.

"And what do you think of that modest leg of mutton?" said Rodolphe. "It looks like something from Jordaens. It's my godmother's favourite."

"Look at those fish," Marcel pointed to some trout... "they are the cleverest swimmers among acquatics, they could climb against any torrent as easily as we accept an invitation to dinner."

"And those juicy fruit arranged like a pyramid... they're pineapples, the rennet apple of the tropics."

"But I prefer that piece of beef," said Marcel "or that ham."

"You're right," replied Rodolphe, "ham is man's friend. But personally I'd prefer that pheasant."

"I think so too, it's the food of crowned heads."

And when they turned away to walk down the street they met the happy noisy crowds which feted Momus, Bacchus, Comus and all the other divinities. They were a little perplexed at first, and asked each other whose nuptials they were celebrating with such pomp. Marcel was the first to remember.

"It's Christmas eve today," he said.

"Do you remember what we did last year?" Rodolphe asked.

"Yes," replied Marcel, a little sadly, "we celebrated at the Café Momus, and Barbemuche paid the bill. I never could believe so frail a woman as Phémie could eat so many sausages."

"It's a pity we can't go to the Momus now," said Rodolphe.

"Alas!" said Marcel, "those days are gone."

"But aren't you going to celebrate Christmas?" asked Rodolphe.

"With whom and with what?" retorted the painter.

"With me, of course."

"And the money?"

"In just a minute," said Rodolphe. "I'll go into this café where I know some people. I'll report in a minute whether we dine on a sardine or a ham."

"Hurry up," replied Marcel, "I'm hungry."

When Rodolphe entered the café he discovered he knew everyone present. A gentleman who had won 300 francs in ten turns of the roulette took a real pleasure in lending Rodolphe 40 sous and, perhaps if he had stayed a little longer, might have lent him 50.

"Well?" asked Marcel when the poet returned.

"Here it is," replied Rodolphe holding out the money.

"Something is better than nothing!" exclaimed Marcel.

Nevertheless, with this modest sum, they found they could

buy some bread, wine, pork, tobacco and wood. They returned to their rooms and it was decided that the feast should be held in Marcel's studio, which was larger. They sat down solemnly at the small table. But they had hardly sat down when the phantoms of the past returned, and they remained for nearly an hour silent and thoughtful and motionless, each trying unsuccessfully to fight against the thought uppermost in his mind. Marcel was the first to break the silence.

"Come, come," he said, "this isn't what you promised me."

"What do you mean?" demanded Rodolphe.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Marcel "why pretend! Both of us are dreaming of what we should forget...I won't deny it."

"Well..."

"Well, this must be the last time. To hell with those women! Come let's think of something else."

"But we say the same thing every time," replied Rodolphe.

"That's because, instead of trying to forget them, we remember them on the slightest pretext. We're slaves of habit, if not of passion. We must break ourselves away from such captivity. The past is past, and we must break the cords which still bind us to it. The time has come when we should march forward without looking behind...our youth is over. It was beautiful no doubt while it lasted, but we must give up such folly, such sheer waste of time. We only make ourselves ridiculous and contemptuous. We cannot continue to live like this any longer, can we? And this independence, this moral freedom of which we boast so much, do we gain anything by it? True liberty, on the other hand, I should think, is to be able to live independent of others, by oneself. But what do we do? The first man that we come across, whose name we'll probably forget in ten minutes, we borrow 100 sous from him. I've had enough! Poetry does not consist in living a disordered life, in love affairs which last as long as a candle and in rebelling against the conventions of the world...it is easier to overthrow a dynasty than a convention, however ridiculous it may be. You don't have to wear a summer coat in December to prove your genius...one can be a true poet or artist and still feel cold and eat three meals a day. All this probably astonishes you, Rodolphe, you'll probably say I've been corrupted, but whatever I've said has been in all sincerity. Unknown to me a slow and salutary change has been taking place and, like a burglar, reason has entered my mind. I've begun to realise the folly of the life I'm leading at present. What will happen if we continue this useless, vagabond life? We'll reach 30 unknown, alone in the world, disgusted with every body and everything, including

ourselves, and envious of all those who have realised their ambitions, whatever they may be...while we continue to be mere parasites. I'm not trying to paint a fantastic picture in order to frighten you, Rodolphe, but I can only see a black future before us. We cannot continue to live such a life because the excuses which led us to adopt it no longer exist."

"Well?" said Rodolphe, "what do you intend doing about it?"

"I want to make myself perfectly clear," Marcel said with the same serious air. "A few minutes back I noticed how we suddenly came under the grip of these old memories...you were thinking of Mimi just as I was thinking of Musette. Well, what I want to say is that in future we should try to forget these women, that we can't continue to sacrifice our lives because of them. We've had our fun, we're old now and our hearts have become hardened. As far as I'm concerned this is the end, and to show that I want to forget Musette altogether, I'm going to throw everything that belongs to her into the fire, everything that helps to perpetuate her memory."

And, having risen, he walked towards a cupboard from which he took out a faded bouquet, a sash, a ribbon and a bundle of letters.

"Aren't you going to follow my example?" he asked Rodolphe.

"You're right Marcel," Rodolphe said, "I'm finished with Mimi."

Rising hastily he searched for a small packet which contained some of Mimi's things, of the same nature as those which Marcel now held in his hand.

"They should at least help to kindle the fire," murmured the painter. "Burn them! Look, there goes Musette's prose."

And for the next few minutes they were occupied in alternately throwing into the fire the relics of their past love.

"Poor Musette," Marcel said, staring at the last article in his hand, a small faded bouquet of field flowers. "Poor Musette. She was a fine girl though, and really loved me." And believing the poet was not watching him he slipped the bouquet into his pocket. He glanced furtively at Rodolphe and caught the poet surreptitiously slipping a small bouquet of Mimi's into his pocket, after having first kissed it tenderly.

"He, too, is a coward like me," murmured the painter to himself.

At the same moment two timid knocks were heard on Marcel's door.

"Who the devil's that?" exclaimed the painter.

A cry of astonishment escaped from him when he opened

the door.

It was Mimi.

The room being dark Rodolphe at first did not recognise his former mistress' voice.

"I'm disturbing you," said Mimi to Marcel.

When Rodolphe heard her voice he felt the blood rush suddenly to his head and had to sit down to calm himself.

"Good evening," Mimi said walking up to him and shaking his hand which he held out mechanically.

"What do you want at this hour of the night?" Marcel asked her

"I'm cold," replied Mimi. "I saw a light in here and thought I'd pay you a visit."

She shivered horribly and her voice sounded sepulchral and filled Rodolphe's heart with fear. He studied her closely. It was not Mimi who stood before him, he thought, but her ghost. She sat before the fire and smiled gratefully at the flame that danced happily in the hearth.

"That's lovely," she said, holding out her hands. Turning to Marcel she asked: "Can't you guess why I've come, Marcel?"

"Quite frankly, no," said Marcel.

"Well, I want a room here. I can't return to my room because my rent is in arrears. I don't know where to go."

"Hell!" exclaimed Marcel, "but what happened to Paul?"

"I left him two months ago. You see, he was angry about those verses Rodolphe wrote...we quarrelled and I left."

"He must have given you a lot of things."

"No, he took them all back...he auctioned them. Although he's so rich he's avaricious and mean...a horrible beast. It was a real purgatory to live with him."

"Doesn't he know what's happened to you?"

"I don't know," replied Mimi. "But don't let's talk about him...the very thought of him makes me sick. I'd prefer to starve rather than take a sou from him."

"Have you been living alone then, since you left him?"

"Yes I have, I've been working for myself. I'm now a painter's model. If you have any work for me..." She added gaily, but noticing a sudden movement from Rodolphe she continued: "Ah, but I only pose for the head and the hands. I still have a lot of money due to me...But haven't you had supper?" she asked suddenly, glancing at the remains of the modest feast on the table.

"No," replied Marcel, "we weren't hungry."

"You're very cheerful, I must say," said Mimi provocatively. Rodolphe, who understood better, made a sign to Marcel.

"Won't you have something to eat with us?" Marcel asked

her. "We intended celebrating together but...we began to think of other things."

"I'm glad I've come in time," Mimi said, looking hungrily at the table, "because I haven't dined at all."

Rodolphe began to twirl vigorously at his moustache to prevent himself from bursting into tears.

"Come along, Rodolphe," Marcel said, "join us."

"No, thanks," replied the poet without moving.

"You're not still angry with me?" asked Mimi in her sweetest voice.

"No, no," said Rodolphe, "it's only having to meet you like...like this."

"It's my fault entirely, Rodolphe. But let's forget the past, shall we? Come on, have supper with us." She rose to take him by the hand, but a sudden weakness forced her to sit down again.

"It's the heat," she explained.

The poet sat down at the table and began to eat with them.

"It's impossible for us to give you a room here," Marcel said to Mimi when the frugal meal was over.

"I suppose I'll have to go somewhere else."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Marcel, "You can stay in my room and I'll stay with Rodolphe."

"But that'll be inconvenient," said Mimi.

"No, no, not at all," protested Marcel, "You must stay with us. Rodolphe and I will be all right. Good night, then, and sleep well."

"Thanks."

"Shall I close it?" Marcel asked her when he reached the door.

"Why not?" Mimi replied glancing at Rodolphe. "I'm not afraid!"

"Well, what are you going to do now?" Marcel asked Rodolphe when the two friends were alone.

"I don't know," stammered Rodolphe.

"Go on, man, why waste time...make it up!"

"What would you have done if Musette had returned?" Rodolphe asked.

"If Musette were in the next room," replied Marcel, "I think I should be with her in fifteen minutes."

"I'll be more courageous than you," said Rodolphe, "I'll stay where I am."

"We'll see," muttered Marcel, getting into bed. "Aren't you coming to bed?"

"Certainly."

When Marcel awoke in the middle of the night he found

Rodolphe missing. In the morning he rapped discreetly at Mimi's door.

"Come in," she called and, when Marcel entered, made a sign to him not to talk too loud in case Rodolphe, who was lying on a couch near her bed, awoke.

"Is that how you spent the night?" Marcel asked astonished.

At this moment Rodolphe suddenly awoke and, after having kissed Mimi, held out his hand to his friend.

"I'm going out to get some money for breakfast," he said, "keep Mimi company."

"Well!" said Marcel to the young girl when they were alone. "What's happened now?"

"Rodolphe still loves me," said Mimi.

"I knew that."

"You were right in trying to separate us. I've treated him very badly."

"Do you still love him?"

"I do, although I've changed considerably since I left him."

"Since you love each other why not make it up?"

"That's impossible," said Mimi.

"But why? You'd certainly have to stay miles away if you leave and don't want him to see you."

"I shall be farther away than that."

"What d'you mean?"

"Look at me," Mimi said starting to cry, and lifting the sheet she showed the artist her shoulders, her neck and her arms.

"Good God!" exclaimed Marcel, "Poor girl!"

"D'you think I could live much longer?"

"But how did you get like this, in so short a time?"

"Oh, well," replied Mimi, "with the life I've led for the past two months it's not surprising. I've spent days posing in studios without a fire and bad food. But that's not all. I've never been able to recover my strength. It's my fault, of course. If I had stayed with Rodolphe such a thing would never have happened. I'm afraid I won't remain very long with him now. How horrible it is to know one is going to die! Rodolphe knows I'm sick, I could read it on his face... he couldn't recognise me!" And burying her head in Marcel's hand she began to sob hysterically.

"No, no, you'll be well again...you only need care and attention," Marcel said.

"This is the end, I know it," Mimi said. "I've no strength left...it took me an hour to climb the stairs. If I had found a woman here I would have thrown myself out of the window."

But he was alone and I'm quite sure he still loves me, Marcel... that's why I don't want to die now. He's so good. It's so sad to realise we can't return to the old days. I feel my lungs are on fire and each time I breathe I feel they'll burst."

Marcel said not a word, Mimi's delirious speech left him astonished and dumb.

At the end of an hour Rodolphe returned accompanied by Schaunard and Gustave Colline. The musician was dressed in cotton, having sold his winter clothes to lend Rodolphe some money, and Colline had helped by selling some of his books. Mimi forced herself to appear as gay as possible to welcome her old friends.

On Marcel's advice Rodolphe had spoken to a doctor friend of his, the same that had at one time treated Francine. When he arrived they left him alone with Mimi. When the doctor joined them he said to Rodolphe:

"You can't keep her here, it'll be a miracle if she recovers. She must go into a hospital. I'll give you a letter to a doctor who'll look after her. If she remains here she'll be dead in eight days."

"But I daren't ask her," protested Rodolphe.

"I've already told her," replied the doctor, "and she has agreed. I'll send you an admission note tomorrow."

"The doctor's right," said Mimi to Rodolphe later, "I must go into hospital...perhaps I'll be cured there. I want to live... you don't realise how much! Besides, you can see me. Don't worry I'll be all right, the doctor told me...and while I'm away you can work and make money so that when I return we can live together again. I'll drink anything they give me to get well...look, my colour has already returned."

Before going into hospital, however, she wanted all her Bohemian friends to spend the evening with her.

"I want to laugh," she told them, "it's good for me. It was Paul who made me ill. He wanted me to learn orthography! And his friends! He used to stitch his own clothes...I'm sure if he married he'd want to have the babies himself!"

Nothing was more heart-rending than the forced gaiety of poor Mimi, and the Bohemians, to please her, made pitiful efforts to dissimulate their tears and make pleasant and cheerful conversation.

The next morning Rodolphe received the doctor's note. Mimi was so weak she could hardly stand and during the journey to the hospital suffered agony with the jolting of the carriage. But she had not entirely lost her interest in things. She made the carriage stop on three occasions to admire the shops.

When she at last entered her room in the hospital a sudden

pain clutched her heart, something told her that she would end her life between those desolate and leprous walls. But she tried everything in her power to forget lugubrious fear. She got into bed and, kissing Rodolphe, promised to see him the following Sunday.

"Bring me some flowers," she added, "some violets."

"Of course, my dear."

Rodolphe drew the curtains around her bed and left. When she heard the retreating footsteps of her lover Mimi began to feel feverish and delirious and, leaning half out of the bed, shouted after him in a voice choked with tears:

"Rodolphe, Rodolphe, come back Rodolphe! I want to go home with you!"

The attendant heard her and tried to calm her.

"Oh, I shall die here!" exclaimed Mimi.

On Sunday morning, the day on which Rodolphe had promised to visit Mimi, he remembered he had to take her some violets. Moved by a poetic superstition he walked to the woods of d'Aulnay and Fontenay, which he had so often visited with Mimi. He found nature, which had looked so gay and happy under the sunny days of June and August, dull and sorrowful under a white blanket of snow. After nearly two hours he was able to gather a small bouquet of violets.

When he arrived at the hospital Mimi, who was now unable to move at all, was delighted.

"My flowers!" she exclaimed with a satisfied smile.

Rodolphe told her of his pilgrimage to the country which held so many memories for them.

"They're lovely!" she said, kissing the flowers.

Schaunard and Colline joined them and the conversation became quite gay. They were, however, soon forced to leave as the hour for visitors had passed.

"Goodbye," said Mimi, "till Thursday then...don't fail and come early."

The following evening when Rodolphe returned to his room he found a note from the doctor waiting for him. It contained only a few words.

DEAR FRIEND,

I have bad news for you. This morning when I entered her room I found the bed empty.

When, some time later, Marcel entered the room he found Rodolphe in an attitude of extreme abstraction. Without saying a word the poet handed the letter.

"Poor girl!" said Marcel.

"It's strange," muttered the poet, "but I don't feel in the least affected. Do you think my love for Mimi could have died with her?"

"Who knows!" said Marcel.

Mimi's sudden death caused a great stir among the Bohemians. Eight days later Rodolphe met the doctor who had informed him of her death.

"My dear Rodolphe," he said, "I'm very sorry about the blunder I made."

"What are you talking about?" Rodolphe asked astonished.

"Don't you know, haven't you seen her again?"

"Seen who?"

"Her! Mimi, of course!"

"Who?" the poet asked turning pale.

"I made a mistake when I wrote that awful note to you. I had been absent for two days and when I returned and paid my usual call I found the bed empty. I asked the nurse and she told me Mimi had died during the night. But this is really what happened. During my absence they shifted Mimi and put another woman, who died, into bed. The day after I wrote to you I found Mimi in the next room. She is very worried. I left a note in your room."

"Good God!" exclaimed Rodolphe, "I haven't been to my room for the past eight days! Mimi alive! What must she think of me! Poor girl! But how is she? When did you last see her?"

"The day before yesterday. She was neither well nor ill. But she's very much worried about you."

"I must go to the hospital immediately."

"Wait a minute," the doctor said when they reached the hospital, "I'll get a pass."

Rodolphe waited for a quarter of an hour in the vestibule. At last the doctor appeared.

"My friend," he said, "suppose the letter I wrote eight days ago is true..."

"What! Mimi..."

"Yes, this morning at four o'clock."

"I want to see her."

"I'm afraid she's not here."

"Thank you, doctor..."

"Would you like me to accompany you?"

"No, I'd prefer to go alone."

## CHAPTER XXIII

## YOUTH IS SHORTLIVED

A YEAR after Mimi's death Rodolphe and Marcel, who still remained together, threw a party to celebrate their success. Marcel who had at last been able to enter the Salon, had had two of his pictures accepted, one of which was bought by a rich Englishman who had once been Musette's lover. With the money he received he paid up his old debts and now lived in a comfortable flat to which a really serious studio was attached. At about the same time both Rodolphe and Schaunard caught the public eye and won fame and fortune for themselves, the one with a book which kept the critics busy for a month and the other with an album of songs which were being sung at all the concerts. Gustave Colline had made a very fortunate marriage and was holding perfect musical evenings.

One evening when Rodolphe was seated on his *own* chair, his feet on his *own* carpet, he saw Marcel enter with a bewildered look on his face.

"D'you know what's happened?" he said.

"No," replied the poet non-chalantly.

"I met Musette yesterday evening."

"Musette! You saw Musette?" Rodolphe asked regretfully.

"Yes, she came to spend her last Bohemian night with me."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"She's to be married"

"Good Lord! To whom?"

"To a postmaster who was her last lover's tutor...a really comical man. Musette told him that before she married him she wanted to be free to do as she liked, that she wanted to drink her last glass of champagne, dance her last quadrille and kiss her lover for the last time. She's been looking for me for the past eight days! But what's the matter with you? You look like a bad copy of a masterpiece."

"You seem to be in very high spirits this evening...I warn you..."

"Don't worry," replied the artist. "We're finished Rodolphe...we're dead and buried. After all youth only lasts for a short time! Where shall we dine?"

"If you like we can dine at our old restaurant on Four Street, where we usually felt hungry after we had eaten."

"No, no!" said Marcel. "I certainly like to recall the past but only over a good bottle of wine and seated on a comfortable chair. I've been corrupted!"

THE END.

.

·



